

1996
H675

ACG 8362

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN EDUCATION: A STUDY OF INTERMEDIATE AGENCIES

An abstract of a Dissertation by
Thomas A. Hoffman
May 1996
Drake University
Advisor: A.P. Johnston

The problem. The problem of this study was to identify and analyze key factors which influence strategic planning processes in three Iowa area education agencies.

Procedures. Through interviews in the three Iowa area education agencies with the most established strategic plans, selected staff and board members who had been involved in their agencies' strategic planning processes provided their perceptions of the key factors of the strategic planning process which included: the role of leadership; the necessary planning and organizational governance structures; the level of resource commitment; and, other factors deemed important.

Findings. The findings of this study included the need for: leadership and commitment from the chief administrative officer and many agency staff; planning structures which incorporated continuity between initial planning and implementation; financial and human resources; tangible results, though the process itself proved more important than any of the products; and, communication about the strategic planning process and plans since a limited number of staff were actually involved. These factors proved to be highly interactive, frequently blurring one with the other and all interdependent.

Conclusions.

1. Strategic planning was the mechanism of choice in an effort to bring focus and coherence to the area education agencies.
2. Top leadership is crucial to the initiation and sustainability of strategic planning.
3. Action planning and implementation received short shrift in the strategic planning process.
4. Resources for strategic planning are difficult to attribute and even more difficult to account for in their consequences.
5. Talk matters; though there were tangible results, the end product resulting from strategic planning was often intangible.
6. Don't ask if you don't want to hear the answer.
7. You don't know what you don't know until you know.

Recommendations. Additional research could be done to measure the success of strategic planning, to identify the role and results of staff and stakeholder participation, to identify or determine the facilitator skills most likely to produce quality strategic plans, and to compare the formal strategic planning process with the informal process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this study was made possible only with an enormous amount of support and encouragement from a host of individuals. I owe each of them a great deal of thanks for helping me through the dissertation process. It is in this portion of the report that I would like to express special acknowledgement for all they did to help me.

The one person to whom I owe a great deal of appreciation is Perry Johnston. I sought him initially to help narrow my focus of study. What he gave me was much more than just help in narrowing the focus of the study. Perry was truly a mentor, guide, and constructive critic. He seemed to be able to draw information and thoughts out of me as I wrote and discussed the various aspects of this study while being genuinely interested in me and the theme of my study. I wish there were a way to thank him for the many hours he spent in discussion and critique of my work. All I can say is that I truly appreciate everything he did to support my study and for the encouragement he gave. He is a master.

The dissertation process can be a very lonely time with all the reading and writing one must do. However, I was fortunate to have a variety of colleagues who encouraged me to continue my work. For all of their support, I would like to express my great appreciation to Wayne Rand, Mike Hupfer, Keith Meyers, John Weaver, and Roger Scott.

Though they were a long distance from me in miles, my parents, Wayne and Genise Hoffman, my brother and sister Steve Hoffman and Mary Kjar, along with my mother-in-law Viola Johnson were continually interested in my progress and provided needed encouragement. I am fortunate to have a family that is so full of love.

Last, but certainly most important, I could not have completed this project without my three girls. Kristi and Erin Hoffman have provided encouragement to me as I worked to complete this dissertation. They never complained about the amount of time their father spent working in his study room or at the library. This is, however, above all else, dedicated to Patty Hoffman, my spouse, my primary supporter, my proofreader, my editor, my friend and much, much more. She is a true partner, without whose effort, encouragement and caring, this effort would never have been completed.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	
Context for the Study	1
Need for the Study.....	5
Statement of the Purpose.....	5
Problem Statement.....	7
Research Questions	7
Limitations.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	8
Organization of the Study.....	10
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction	11
Planning Structure.....	12
Participation.....	14
Governance Structure.....	16
Leadership.....	16
Resources	17
Communication.....	18
Summary.....	19

3.	DESIGN OF THE STUDY	
	Introduction	21
	Selection of Settings	21
	Selection of Respondents	24
	Data Collection Techniques	25
	Pre-Pilot and Pilot Study	28
	Data Analysis	28
	Ethical Issues	31
	Researcher's Perspective	31
4.	FINDINGS	
	Historical Context	33
	Leadership	36
	Initiation of Strategic Planning in the	
	Area Education Agencies	36
	Continuation of Strategic Planning	37
	Evidence of Leadership	39
	Planning Structures	40
	Administrative Support	40
	Initial Planning Retreat	41
	Action Planning and Implementation	42
	Communication	43
	Organizational Governance	46
	Commitment of Resources	48
	Level of Commitment	49
	Where Financial Resources Were Directed	50
	Participation	52

	Other Key Factor	56
	Discussion of Findings.....	59
5.	SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
	Summary.....	69
	Conclusions.....	72
	Implications.....	75
	Recommendations.....	78
	References.....	81

Tables

Table	Page
1. Iowa Area Education Agencies and Strategic Plans.....	23
2. Horizontal Approach for Data Analysis.....	30

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Context for the Study

Iowa's three-tiered system of education agencies has been in existence since about 1858 when county superintendents were placed between local districts and the State Department of Public Instruction. These superintendents oversaw the nearly 5,000 county school districts. The number of school districts in Iowa has steadily declined over the years; now there are only 384 local school districts (Iowa Department of Education, 1995) and a very different sort of intermediate agency.

As the number of school districts decreased, the role of the county superintendents became mostly one of maintaining licensing and other records, particularly for special education and curriculum services. Eventually, the county system was able to employ school psychologists and speech clinicians that could not have been afforded by an individual school district. In 1957 the state legislature allowed individual county systems to merge into joint-county agencies offering more services for distribution to a larger number of schools.

In 1974, in an effort to provide more equitable services throughout the state while also meeting the new state and federal special education mandates, lawmakers in the Iowa General Assembly approved Senate File 1163 that established fifteen area education agencies (AEAs). The roles and responsibilities of the area education agencies were to be principally service and leadership, but also regulatory in special education.

Chapter 273 of the Code of Iowa establishes the legal responsibilities for area education agencies as provided for in Senate File 1163. Chapter 273.1 Intent of the Iowa Code states:

It is the intent of the general assembly to provide an effective,

efficient, and economical means of identifying and serving children from under five years of age through grade twelve who require special education and any other children requiring special education as defined in section 256B.2; to provide for media services and other programs and services for pupils in grades kindergarten through twelve and children requiring special education as defined in section 281.2; to provide a method of financing the programs and services; and to avoid duplication of programs and services provided by any other school corporation in the state; and to provide services to school districts under contract with those school districts (p. 2143).

The initial legislation and rules that followed, noted in Chapter 273 of the Code of Iowa, provided a framework for the following: services to be provided; funding sources and purposes; a governance structure including a board of directors elected by local education agency board of directors; and, geographic boundaries to be established for the service area.

On July 1, 1975, fifteen area education agencies commenced operation as intermediate educational service agencies serving all K-12 public and private local education agencies as long as these local education agencies held proper certification by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction, now called the Iowa Department of Education.

The three-tiered system of education agencies that began in 1858 remained intact. Area education agencies were intermediate service agencies placed between the local education agency, or K-12 school districts, and the state department of education. Unlike local education agencies, area education agencies had very little control over direct teaching and learning of children. Thus, the only means area education agencies had for affecting teaching and

learning was by **how** well they delivered their services to the local education agencies.

Generally **speaking**, local education agencies did not develop long-range plans for **two** main reasons. First, they did not have staff trained in long-range planning. **Secondly**, it seemed that local education agencies became so inundated with **state** mandates and local issues that they could not take time to plan for the future.

Therefore, **local** education agencies often looked to the area education agencies for **services** and leadership. As part of their mission related to leadership, the **area** education agencies had to anticipate the future needs of educators and **students** and then develop services to meet the identified needs. A keen **understanding** of current educational research, programs and practices coupled with a **well-established**, long-range plan would help insure that the best possible **leadership** and services could be provided to local educational agencies.

Although **some** forms of strategic planning originated in the military and may have been **used** for hundreds of years, strategic planning was adopted as a corporate planning process in the 1960s. General Electric is generally given credit for **beginning** strategic planning, though several other corporations initiated this **type of** planning about the same time. Public agencies began using strategic **planning** in the 1970s because of the successes noted by corporations who **had** been using this form of long-range planning for several years. While **there has** been a fairly extensive collection of research completed on strategic planning in the private sector, more limited research was available on the public sector **use** of strategic planning.

Considered **to be** one of the founders, H. Igor Ansoff (1988) said strategic planning takes **place** in systems with steps that range from formulation to

implementation. He emphasized the importance of an appropriate set of objectives as an integral part of the strategy formulation process. According to George A. Steiner (1979), strategic planning was an attitude and a way of life and necessitated dedication to acting on the basis of how we contemplated the future. Shirley D. McCune (1986) stated:

Strategic planning is a process for organizational renewal and transformation. This process provides a means of matching services and activities with changed and changing environmental conditions. Strategic planning provides a framework for the improvement and restructuring of programs, management, collaborations, and evaluation of the organization's progress (p. 34).

In order to plan services for the future needs of the local education agencies, several of Iowa's area education agencies initiated strategic planning processes in the last seven years. To date, no one appeared to have studied the strategic planning processes employed by the Iowa area education agencies. There were several aspects of strategic planning that could be studied. One could be the correlation of the planning process to the mission and goals of the organization. Another could be whether or not there were positive outcomes as a direct result from strategic planning. And yet another could be whether involving stakeholders in the planning process provided for better commitment on the part of stakeholders. Of the many options for study, the present research sought a straight-forward and careful description of the factors which have comprised the strategic plans in these agencies, analyses of how they worked and, given their short life, only initial perceptions of their performance. Such information, it can be argued, would be essential to area education agency long-range planning.

Need for the Study

Currently, little is known about how area education agencies actually perform their necessary planning activities. Area education agencies do not submit agency-wide plans but rather plans and reports developed by the three individual divisions of the area education agency. Yet, the area education agencies function as an agency with a single chief administrative officer, a board of directors, standard board policies, and an overall mission. Since little was known about the planning activities of area education agencies, this study identified key factors that comprise strategic plans and provided a deeper understanding and historical basis for their planning activities.

The literature on the use of strategic planning in public sector organizations was not as extensive as it was in private sector organizations. Further theoretical research was needed to help document the use of strategic planning in public sector organizations as indicated by Bryson (1988):

Research must explore a number of theoretical and empirical issues in order to advance the knowledge and practice of strategic planning in the public and nonpublic worlds. In particular, strategic planning processes that are responsive to different situations in the public and nonprofit sectors must be developed and tested. These processes should specify key situational factors governing their use ... (p. 44).

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was two-fold: first, to inform the leadership and staff members in public sector organizations regarding the factors important in the development of strategic plans; and secondly, to contribute to the theoretical literature on strategic planning in public sector organizations.

The results of this study should be valuable to administrative staff and board of directors in all of the area education agencies as well as to other intermediate educational service agencies throughout the United States which must also provide leadership and service to their member school districts. School districts may also want to consider the results of this study as they develop their own strategic planning processes. Thus, the results of this study should be important and helpful to the staff members in the fifteen area education agencies in Iowa and, potentially, to other education agencies. For example, it would be very useful to an organization to know the level, amount, or type of leadership, structure, governance and budget needed for strategic planning.

This study could also provide guidance as area education agencies refine their plans. All of the area education agency strategic plans were relatively new and would benefit from the information gained as a result of this study. By identifying key factors of strategic plans, other organizations of similar structure and governance might benefit as they develop or modify their own strategic plans.

Area education agency planning factors could be helpful to other public sector organizations as well. Many school districts, colleges and universities, and state departments of education have been using strategic planning to establish a focus for the future. They, too, might profit by findings of a study on strategic planning by area education agencies.

Besides providing leaders and staff members with information about factors important in the development of strategic plans, this study should contribute to the theoretical basis for the use of strategic planning in specific types of public sector organizations. As organizations were different in respect to their private or public missions, so too may their planning be different in that

the agencies in question were intermediate units, sandwiched between a policy intensive state government and an operations-intensive local school system.

But considerable research has been done in the public sector such as the numerous articles and books written relative to the initial development of a strategic plan in public sector organizations (Bryson, 1988; Herman, 1989a, 1989b; Kaufman, 1991; Kaufman & Herman, 1991). These articles and books described primarily how to develop a strategic plan. However, less research seemed to have been done on the factors in a plan coupled with implementation of the plan. This study helped provide research relative to the key factors found in the implementation of strategic plans.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study was to identify and analyze key factors which influence strategic planning processes in three Iowa area education agencies.

Research Questions

1. Historical Context: To what extent had planning taken place in the organizations under study prior to the initiation of a strategic planning process?
2. Leadership: What role did leadership play in the development and implementation of the strategic planning process?
3. Planning Structures: What planning structures were necessary in the strategic planning process?
4. Organizational Governance: What organizational governance structures were in place to insure the planning process was developed and implemented?
5. Commitment of Resources: What level of resource commitment was made? Where were the financial resources directed? To what extent were staff encouraged to participate in the strategic planning process?
6. Other Key Factors: What other key factors were important in the strategic planning process?

Limitations

The focus of this study was on the elements of the strategic planning process in the three Iowa area education agencies which had strategic plans for the longest time. It was not the intent of this study to identify the internal workings of the strategic planning committees, nor was it an attempt to directly measure the planning process to the successful accomplishment of the mission and goals of area education agencies. This study did not attempt to generalize strategic planning done in the three area education agencies studied to other area education agencies or with strategic planning done in either local school districts, universities or corporations. The focus of the study, rather, was to carefully describe the work of the most mature strategic planning operations available in area education agencies and analyze their conditions, similarities, and dissimilarities as a source of highly relevant information for others who judge themselves to be in like circumstances. Information from this study should be a link in improvement efforts for others, but was not intended to develop a model for others to follow.

All interviewees were employees or board members of an area education agency. All interviewees had been involved with their agency's strategic planning process at some point. No attempt was made to seek input from either employees or stakeholders of the agencies who had not been involved with the area education agency strategic planning process.

Definition of Terms

Though there were numerous definitions for strategic planning, the one used for this study was developed by John M. Bryson. Bryson (1988) defined strategic planning as "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it" (p. 5).

Area education agencies were intermediate educational service agencies. Though there were intermediate education agencies found in other states, area education agency was the name used specifically in Iowa. Area education agencies operated as an extension of the state department of education by providing services to public and non-public K-12 schools who have gained approval from the state department of education.

Governance referred to agency rules, policies, and procedures, and, the role of committees and the board of directors, along with the authority of each.

Structure referred to the way of proceeding. Everett M. Rogers (1983) defined structure as "the patterned arrangement of the units in a system. This structure gives regularity and stability to human behavior in a social system" (p. 24). Structure included the organization's mission, goals, reports, and relationship of committees.

The planning process involves all aspects of an organization, through active involvement of people, aimed at determining what an organization wants to be, where it is going, and how it will get there. The planning process is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Outcomes or outputs result from planning. Planning resides somewhere between policy and internal operations though it influences organizational philosophy and external services.

Leadership is vital to any strategic planning process. Leadership, according to Cohen (1990), is "the art of influencing others to their maximum performance to accomplish any task, objective, or project" (p. 9). Kotter (1988) summarized leadership as a process of moving a group in some direction through mostly noncoercive means. He referred to effective leadership as leadership that produced movement in the long-term best interests of the group. Leadership, for this study, included the leadership derived from the chief

administrative officer of the area education agency, the strategic planning process facilitator, and the committee chairpersons.

Resources referred to both the human and financial commitment made to support the strategic planning process. Staff members were encouraged to take the time necessary in order for them to be a part of the strategic planning process. Funding or financial support must be provided to support the strategic planning projects and goals.

Middle management referred to those management staff who are not either the chief administrator or division directors.

General staff referred to all other staff not included in middle management or as chief administrator and division directors.

Organization of the Study

The second chapter of this study reviews the literature on strategic planning in general along with the topics of the research questions. The third chapter presents the study's methodology in detail. In the fourth chapter, the findings on the research questions are presented as well as discussion and analysis of those findings. The fifth, and final chapter, summarizes the study and provides conclusions, implications and recommendations.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on strategic planning is voluminous. This review is not intended to be comprehensive but is a distillation of the literature into several categories or themes which could be helpful in identifying questions to pursue with area education agency personnel and board members through interviews or other means. This chapter reviews the extant literature -- empirical findings as well as theoretical assertions -- which would become the basis of this research on public intermediate agencies. Following a brief introduction, the chapter presents the themes extracted from the literature.

Introduction

Strategic planning became well known nearly thirty years ago as a corporate management practice which incorporated program and budget planning (Porter, 1987). Corporations identified a need for long range budget planning rather than just annual budget projections thus initiating the early strategic plans. Strategic planning became a way to establish a vision for the future. Steiner (1979) summarized strategic planning as the ability to think strategically, to visualize outcomes, to design systems and structures that enable people to achieve them, and to choose actions that can help accomplish the mission. Olsen and Eadie (1982) added that an important aspect of strategic planning was the attention devoted to key factors that improve the chances for successful implementation, such as the link between plans and process and the support and commitment of management and the chief executive officer. According to Kaufman and Jacobs (1987) what makes strategic planning unique was its emphasis on joining all of the factors or elements together as part of a strategic thinking and acting process.

Over the years there has evolved a set of commonly accepted components that comprised a strategic planning process. Most experts on strategic planning suggested strongly that all stakeholders should be represented and involved in the development of their organization's strategic plan. There were even suggestions for what not to do related to the strategic planning process.

Planning Structure

The literature on strategic planning was replete with components that should comprise the planning portion of a strategic plan. Writers on strategic planning generally included components such as an environmental scan, mission statement, internal and external analysis, strategy development, action plan, implementation, and some form of monitoring system (McCune, 1986; Jenne, 1986; Below, Morrissey, & Acomb, 1987; Bryson & Roering, 1987; Bryson, 1988; Herman, 1989a, 1989b; Phelan, Kirkland, & Freed, 1991; Kaufman & Herman, 1991). As part of a conceptual framework, Wechsler & Backoff (1987) suggested a series of internal factors necessary in strategy formulation including:

the strength of leadership, intensity of the formal planning effort, the organization's capacity for performance, the degree of internal policy consensus, the amount of discretion allowed strategists and planners, the availability of autonomous funding sources, and the type of policy for which the agency is responsible (p. 36).

There existed fairly strong consensus that the strategic planning procedures used in the private sector could not be adopted exactly for use in the public sector. The private and public sectors differ dramatically in their management style, bottom line goals, and ability to measure results from the

plans they initiated. Bryson and Roering (1987) developed a chart for the "comparison of private sector approaches to strategic planning and their applicability to the public sector" (pp. 12-14). The chart identified nine different approaches to strategic planning, including the Harvard policy and ones developed by noted authors such as Lorange and Freeman, which were developed for use in the private sector. Furthermore, the chart provided details about the key features, assumptions, strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and the applicability of the approach to the public sector. The "key features" section included information about stakeholder involvement, resources, and organization governance.

Horner (1979) and Halachmi (1986) suggested that the bottom line for the private sector was almost always profit-driven. In private sector strategic planning, the results were usually measured in market share, profit margin, or new product development (Steiner, 1979; Ansoff, 1988; Birnbaum, 1990). Quantifiable data was gathered by private sector organizations to determine whether the desired results had been achieved.

However, in public sector, obtaining quantifiable results has not seemingly been a priority within strategic planning. The literature on strategic planning results in the public sector was very limited. Part of the reason for a lack of attention to results in education is that the bottom line in education was much more difficult to identify and quantify. Politics had a much greater influence over public sector planning than it does in the private sector (Cope, 1981; Horner 1979). The ways in which decisions were made were much different as well. Cope (1981) noted that participative decision-making was the norm in the public sector, while top-down decision-making was more common in the private sector. According to Bryson and Roering (1987), "strategic

planning approaches developed in the private sector must be applied with care and caution to public purposes" (p. 9).

Several prominent authors on public sector strategic planning (McCune, 1986; Below et al., 1987; Bryson, 1988) made very little mention of results. Mintzberg (1994) stated: "Planners have been notably reluctant to study their own efforts - not only what they really do but, more important, what they and their processes of planning really get done, in terms of impact on the functioning and effectiveness of their organizations" (p. 91).

Participation

The strategic planning process, used by public organizations, generally involved numerous people within an organization. Several authors supported the participation of staff in order to gain some level of commitment to the outcomes of the planning process (Parson & Culligan, 1985; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Nutt, 1987; Schilit, 1987; Bryson, 1988; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Lorange & Roos, 1992). In writing about the use of strategic planning by educators, McCune's (1986) statement summarized the sentiment of most supporters of stakeholder involvement when she said, "If time is taken to involve affected and interested parties (stakeholders), the plan will become their plan, implementation will be accelerated, and the potential for future conflict and disagreement will be reduced" (p. 37). Below et al. (1987) stated that the strategic planning process itself built commitment because the participants gained ownership. On the other hand, in a study conducted of middle-level managers in 20 organizations, Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) found that "low levels of involvement may reduce commitment, but that involvement alone does not create commitment" (p. 238). Steel (1991) contended that "not only must each employee and manager have a full understanding of the strategies, but must also know the implementation strategies and programs the organization

has undertaken" (p. 122). In other words, in order for participation to lead beyond pro forma involvement and have the desired consequences of commitment, staff must be given the opportunity to see agency's vision and become a part of the connection between the vision for the organization and the outcomes of the strategic plan.

In establishing what strategic planning is, it is important to understand what strategic planning is not. Several authors have written about what strategic planning is not such as Steiner (1979), who stated that strategic planning is not: "an attempt to blueprint the future"; "a forecasting tool"; "a replacement for managerial intuition and judgment"; "a simple aggregation of functional plans or an extrapolation of the current financial status"; or, "an attempt to make future decisions" (p. 16).

Several authors have also noted the fallacy of excluding critical components of strategic planning. Herman (1988) identified pitfalls to avoid which he noted as: "not including stakeholders in the planning process"; "not allowing sufficient time for planning"; "not allocating sufficient resources to support the planning effort"; "forgetting to gain commitment by employees and stakeholders"; and, "forgetting that planning is a continuous process" (p. 16). Mintzberg (1994) reminded those involved in strategic planning not to rely exclusively on hard, quantitative data since it often lacked richness. He suggested that the data used for strategic planning includes softer forms of data such as "gossip, hearsay, and various other intangible scraps of information" (p. 111). And finally, Herman (1992) stated that there were several factors that could hinder an organization's implementation of the strategic planning process which included: "lack of support from the CEO; non-inclusion of stakeholders; reluctance to allocate sufficient human, financial or material resources; and, lack of governing board sanction" (p. 40).

Governance Structure

Quite aside from the importance of the processes involved, organizational structure influences almost everything that goes on in organizations. Organizational structures help develop patterns in order to make sense of the complexities of everyday life, and by definition, every organization operates with some form of structure. Bolman and Deal (1991) stated that "all organizations have goals, boundaries, level of authority, communication systems, coordinating mechanisms, and distinctive procedures" (pp. 45-46). In fact, according to these authors, organizations often become so structured into one of the "frames," that they limit their vision to a single frame and almost unnoticeably restrict their options. Strategic planning may flourish, or perish, by how adapted it is to the structure. In particular reference to this study, Hersey and Blanchard (1988) suggest that organizations are social systems with several interrelated subsystems where a change in one subsystem could have an impact on another subsystem. The form of structure used by area education agencies would be most like the "divisionalized form" noted by Mintzberg (1979) in which "the bulk of their work is done in quasi-autonomous units ..." (p. 89).

Leadership

Leadership was expected to be one of the critical factors in strategic planning. Steiner (1979) stated: "There can and will be no effective formal strategic planning in an organization in which the chief executive does not give it firm support and make sure that others in the organization understand his depth of commitment" (p. 80). Wechsler and Backoff (1987) stated further that "among the internal factors in the strategy environment are the strength of leadership ..." (p. 36).

The literature on the role and function of leadership in organizations was extensive (Burns, 1978; Steiner, 1979; Bolman & Deal, 1984; Bennis & Nahus, 1985; Bass, 1985; Boyers, 1988-89; Kotter, 1990). Olsen and Eadie (1982) noted that the leadership begins with the chief executive officer, whose support and participation is essential, according to their research, to the success of strategic planning. Below et al. (1987) further noted that "senior-level commitment must demonstrate a willingness to invest the time necessary to do an effective job of planning and to regularly review results against the plan" (p. 20).

There was also literature related specifically to the need for leadership in strategic planning (Breck, 1989; Thompson, Johnson, Warren, & Williams, 1990; Phelan, Kirkland, & Freed, 1991). Nutt (1987) found that the manager's active participation significantly improved the adoption prospects of the strategic plan. In their study, Guth and MacMillan (1986) found that the ability by middle management to understand, anticipate and manage processes needed to gain commitment to the strategic plan from the general staff was a critical management skill. Though the need for leadership was consistently referenced in the literature, there were at least two writers who refrained from focusing on the importance of leadership. Lorange (1980) suggested that CEOs should maintain a more distant role in strategic planning than up-close and hands-on. Herman (1989) left leadership out of his list of important elements to successful strategic planning.

Resources

Resources, in this study, included both financial and human. Financial and human resources were necessary resources in order to conduct strategic planning. There was significant literature related to both financial and human resources which included the statement by Bolman and Deal (1991) that "most

important decisions in organizations involve the allocation of scarce resources..." (p. 186).

On the financial side of resources, Siegel (1977) reminded one that the "budget lies at the heart of public policy" since "the budget tells us who gets what in public funds" (p. 45). Wildavsky (1974) stated that "those who make a budget intend that there will be a direct connection between what is written in it and future events" (p. 1). Lorange and Roos (1992) provided discussion about the need to set aside sufficient financial resources in order to carry out the various strategic planning activities.

Human resources were also needed for strategic planning. The various committees and planning teams would need people to conduct the business of that work group. Lorange and Roos (1992) provided a summary of the relevant literature (Dalton, 1970; Cope, 1981; Parson & Culligan, 1985; Bolman & Deal, 1991; Herman, 1992), when they stated that "each organization must be willing and able to nominate and release the necessary human resources" (p. 109). Bryson (1988) noted also that in his opinion "strategic planning is not expensive in dollar terms, but it is expensive when it comes to the resources that typically are scariest in most organizations and communities -- the attention and commitment of key decision makers" (p. 227).

Communication

Strategic planning was new to all three area education agencies involved in this study. Staff members were not familiar with strategic planning as a concept or as to the perceived need for it. In this situation, in order to overcome the lack of knowledge about strategic planning as a concept and tool, Below et al. (1987) suggest that "plan communication, an informational sharing of the plan throughout the organization, is absolutely essential if the plan is to be implemented" (p. 115). Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) stated "the higher level

of strategic understanding and commitment facilitates the smooth implementation of strategy" (p. 232). There was additional literature on communication relevant to this study. Fullan (1993) noted that all staff were responsible for helping make an organization capable of change and renewal, which he suggested meant that staff needed to know about organizational plans. In adopting a new program, practice or plan, Rogers (1983) noted that most people in an organization were influenced by what their peers conveyed to them about the new innovation. Schmuck and Runkel (1985) stated that staff, in order to be clear about goals and plans, must have an "open flow" of communication. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) further suggested that communication is a very important skill for leaders "since leaders spend more time communicating than doing any other single activity" (p. 307). The literature suggests that communication is critical in helping staff become knowledgeable about the strategic plan itself, and in order to gain commitment from staff to the planning efforts.

Summary

There was a great deal of literature related to strategic planning, particularly relevant to private-sector organizations, though there was sufficient literature also relevant to public-sector organizations. Numerous writers made suggestions for planning structures and involvement of staff and stakeholders in strategic planning. The need for leadership in strategic planning was well documented. Both human and financial resource needs were clearly noted in the literature as well. There was less information in the literature about strategic planning relative to the importance and role of communication and gaining results from the planning process.

There was no research literature found that related specifically to area education agencies. Thus, the literature noted was confined to the identified factors related to strategic planning.

Chapter 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Qualitative methodology was adopted for this study in order to learn about the key factors of the strategic planning processes in three Iowa area education agencies. In accordance with qualitative methodology, this study was designed to learn about and describe the key factors of three area education agencies from the participants' points of view. Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggested the use of qualitative study for research that "delves in-depth into the complexities and processes" (p. 46). The research questions were developed based on related strategic planning literature and the researcher's hunches concerning key factors of strategic plans.

The research was designed to gain an understanding of the area education agency strategic planning process from the perspectives of staff and board members who had been involved and from documents which were part of the planning process. The perspectives from staff members who had been involved were valuable, while the documents helped confirm and verify what had actually been developed as a strategic plan.

The remainder of this chapter provides a description of the methodology used in the study. The topics will include the following: the method for determining the settings and respondents; a description of the data collection techniques to be used; a list of the interview questions; a brief overview of a pilot study; the data analysis methods; ethical issues for consideration; and, the researcher's perspective.

Selection of the Settings

This study took place in three Iowa area education agencies. The selection of these settings was based on the concept that several of the

agencies had been actively involved in strategic planning and that very little research had been done on area education agencies in general.

There were fifteen area education agencies in the state of Iowa. Eight of the fifteen area education agencies indicated that they had strategic plans, seven of which were active. One area education agency indicated that they had a strategic plan, but it was "dead". The seven area education agencies with active strategic plans represented both the largest and the smallest of the agencies. All of the area education agencies without active strategic plans would be considered area education agencies with medium to small student populations. Through a telephone survey, it was determined which area education agencies had active strategic planning processes and the length of time those processes had been in existence.

Chart 1 below provides a notation of whether the fifteen area education agencies did or did not have active strategic planning processes and how long the strategic planning processes had been in existence. There is no area education agency 8.

Table 1

Iowa Area Education Agencies and Strategic Plans

AEA #	Those with a plan	How long plans existed
-------	-------------------	------------------------

1	Yes	4 years, but dead
2	No	
3	No	
4	Yes	5 years
5	No	
6	No	
7	No	
9	Yes	6 years
10	Yes	8 years
11	Yes	4 years
12	Yes	4 years
13	Yes	6 years
14	Yes	5 years
15	No	
16	No	

The three area education agencies selected used strategic planning for at least six years, while the other non-selected sites had been involved with strategic planning for only four to five years. Normally, the longer a process of any kind had been used, the more refined and mature it had become. There was no attempt to determine those area education agencies with the highest quality strategic planning processes as the evaluation of planning would be such an evanescent activity.

Three sites were chosen, rather than one site, in order to gain the perspective of different agency personnel and board members, using different strategic planning approaches, and from different parts of the state of Iowa. Patton (1980) stated that "multiple sources of information are sought and multiple resources are used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective on the program" (p. 157). On the other hand, it would not be feasible, and likely not productive, to include all eight sites with strategic plans in the study.

Selection of Respondents

A purposeful sampling technique was used to select staff and a board member in three area education agencies. This study employed a technique much like the one used by Wechsler (1985) when he selected specific individuals who had been involved in strategic planning to interview. The selection technique incorporated methodology considerations along with some suggestions from the agency chief administrator. The people to be interviewed were chosen because of their involvement in their agencies' strategic planning process, their knowledge of relevant history of their particular agency, and how the planning process was structured, funded, led, and/or governed. Using people who were well versed in the strategic planning process helped eliminate speculation about what actually happened in each of the area education agency strategic planning processes.

From two of the area education agencies, there were 9 or 10 people selected and interviewed. Staff were identified based on their job titles and their active responsibility with the strategic planning process. The following individuals were included: the chief administrator; a member of the board of directors; all division directors; the person responsible for the ongoing strategic planning process (if different from those already selected); two or three

committee/team chairpersons; and, two strategic planning committee/team members. At least one of the interviewees was from an agency satellite office. Respondents representing these positions provided information from various aspects of the strategic planning process.

In one area education agency it was decided that the interviews would be confined to the chief administrator, the division directors (one of whom was also the internal facilitator), and a board member. This particular area education agency had just conducted a revision of the original plan completed six years earlier and had not begun to develop new committees and teams. Therefore, there were not committee members or chairpersons established. Thus, interviews were not conducted with people in committee member or chairperson positions.

Selecting a wide variety of staff people who were knowledgeable of their agency's strategic planning process helped safeguard validity and trustworthiness as suggested by several authors (Agar, 1980; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

Data Collection Techniques

The primary data gathering techniques for this study were interviews along with a review of the strategic planning documents. The interviews contained a single broad question which allowed respondents to identify the factors or conditions they deemed to be key to strategic planning. From there, probing questions were asked to insure that responses had been made to the research questions identified earlier. Some of the probing questions were descriptive, some investigative, and some analytic. Not all probing questions necessarily were asked of all participants. Rather, the judgment was made concerning which participants had the most helpful insights on various aspects

of the strategic planning process. All responses were audio tape recorded and transcribed for use in the analysis process.

The first two interview questions were designed to help the interviewee relax and become comfortable with the interview process. It was found during a pilot interview that the interviewees were somewhat nervous and uncomfortable. The responses to these two questions also provided the researcher with background information about the interviewee and their area education agency.

1. How long have you worked at your AEA and what kinds of job responsibilities have you had?
2. Describe the long range planning your agency conducted prior to initiating the strategic planning process.

The next question was broad and allowed the interviewees to speak freely about the various aspects of strategic planning as they have experienced it in their area education agency.

3. Your Agency has been involved in strategic planning for _____ years; it is one of only three AEAs in the state to sustain such an effort. As you see it, what factors or conditions have been key in your strategic planning process?

Further probing questions ascertained responses to aspects of this research not provided from the responses given to question 3. The following questions elicited responses which answered the six research questions noted earlier:

4. Tell me about your AEA strategic planning process.
 - Who initiated it?
 - Who is primarily responsible for its continuation?
 - How do goals develop?
 - How do staff (and others) know about the plan and its progress?

5. Describe the committee/team member composition and how the committee/teams work.
6. Describe the planning and reporting process.
 - Who calls the meetings? How often do committees meet?
 - Describe a typical planning meeting/session.
 - Who receives copies of the plans and progress reports?
7. How do you know if you are getting results as a result of the strategic planning process? How are you accountable for the time and money spent on strategic planning?
8. How would you describe the chief administrator's leadership style? Describe his role in the strategic planning process?
9. Has the level of funding been adequate to support the strategic plans? For what purposes are funds used to support the strategic plans? In what ways are funds restricted?
10. Do staff know about the strategic plan? How would you describe the feelings staff have about your strategic planning process? In what ways are staff encouraged to participate in strategic planning? Are the staff willing to participate in the strategic planning process?
11. In your opinion, what are the key factors that make your strategic planning process successful? How do they interact with each other?
12. Knowing what you know now about strategic planning, what advice would you give a group beginning to develop their own strategic plan?
13. Is there anything else concerning the strategic planning process and your area education agency that I have not asked but you think I should know?

Each area education agency had a strategic planning document that identified the beliefs, mission, and strategies (goals). The documents served as verification of the planning process rather than an evaluation of it.

Pre-Pilot & Pilot Study

A pre-pilot study was conducted using two staff members who served on Heartland Area Education Agency 11 strategic planning committees. Their responses were used to modify the order in which the questions were asked and to help validate the interview questions themselves.

A pilot study was then conducted using selected staff of the Heartland Area Education Agency 11 for two purposes. First of all, the pilot study was done to insure further clarity of the interview questions. Secondly, the pilot study showed that the responses to the interview questions did answer the research questions.

This pilot study was done once the formal proposal was accepted, the interview questions were refined further, and additional research had been completed.

Data Analysis

The researcher provided an analysis of the data collected through the use of interviews and documents. The comments made by the respondents during the interview were grouped by major research topic and summarized. Findings, regardless of their support for the primary research questions, were noted.

All interviews were recorded on audio tape and transcribed verbatim for review and analysis. The notes taken during the interviews augmented the transcribed interviews.

This research study was designed to elicit responses related to the key factors of strategic planning as a means of designing more effective strategic plans in the future. It was not designed primarily to study area education agencies, though they were the setting for the research. Neither was the study designed to compare one area education agency strategic planning process

with another. Finally, this study was also not designed to compare people in any way, but rather to insure that the views of a variety of people from each area education agency were solicited.

Since the researcher desired to identify and analyze the key factors in strategic planning, the data analysis was structured. The data was gathered according to the initial interview question along with each of the probing questions and the responses made by each person in each area education agency. Table 2 provides the structure for data analysis whereby the responses from each person (1-9, or 10) in each of the three area education agencies (identified as AEA A, B, and C) were summarized by the initial interview and additional probing questions 1-13.

Table 2

Horizontal Approach for Data Analysis

Interview	AEA A	AEA B	AEA C
Questions	Person #	Person #	Person #
	1,2,3,4,5,	1,2,3,4,5,	1,2,3,4,5,
	6,7,8,9	6,7,8,9,10	
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

The data was categorized as closely as possible by interview question and then coded back to the research questions noted earlier. The data was also reviewed by respondent title and area education agency in order to

understand **points** of view, not for comparison purposes. Once the data was categorized by **key** factors, comparisons were made.

The **strategic** planning documents developed by each of the three area education **agencies** were reviewed. The documents verify the strategic plan components, **including** the mission statement, beliefs, and objectives, which had been **identified** in the interviews.

The data **gathered** from the interviews was compared to the literature on strategic planning and to the literature on the topics of the research questions in order to draw **similarities** and differences with the extant literature, and to discuss the **findings** of this study.

The **analysis** of the data concluded with drawing general conclusions regarding the **research** questions outlined earlier. Implications of the study, meaning **insights** gained by the researcher which, while directly related to the study, were not **clearly** or irresolutely resolved by the data.

Ethical Issues

As **pointed** out in Bogdan and Biklen (1982), those who were interviewed should be **protected** from any harm that might come from identification. The respondents **were** provided informed consent before any participation occurred and the **interviews** were conducted. Every effort was made to avoid identification of **particular** respondents.

Before **the** interviews were conducted, each respondent was informed of the purpose of **the** study. The researcher sought voluntary participation from those selected **to be** interviewed.

Researcher's Perspective

While **conducting** the study, the researcher attempted to remain aware of the possibility of **bias** even with his own personal background. The researcher was employed **by** an area education agency and actively involved with the

strategic planning process of that agency. The researcher's connection with an area education agency strategic planning process provided insights otherwise not available, but also required that he be particularly aware of bias in the study. The researcher made every attempt to remain neutral in questioning the interviewees and in recording the responses made. In the analysis of data stages, the researcher based findings on the comments made by respondents and the content of agency documents rather than subjective inferences from the researcher.

No portion of the actual study was conducted at the researcher's place of employment, which helped avoid bias.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

This chapter is devoted to an in-depth presentation of the findings of the research questions posed in Chapter One. In the first section, the findings related to question 1, concerning the historical context of area education agencies, are described. The second and third sections include the research findings related to the role of leadership in strategic planning and the findings of the planning structures that were necessary for strategic planning. The fourth section identifies the organizational governance structures that accommodated and encouraged strategic planning in the three area education agencies, and in the fifth, the findings of both human and financial resources necessary for strategic planning are presented. The sixth section presents the findings of other key factors including staff and stakeholder participation, communication, and results of strategic planning. The final section of this chapter contains further discussion and analysis of the findings.

Historical Context

Area education agencies were legislated into existence on July 1, 1975. Each area education agency had specific responsibilities to provide service and leadership, with regulatory authority in special education, to local school districts. Area education agencies were designed to support the needs that local school districts identified, to carry out the mandates established by the state department of education, and to provide leadership in the implementation of new initiatives. Ideally, area education agencies provided the services that supported the most effective and efficient teaching and learning process.

The area education agencies were established with three separate divisions including media services, educational services and special education. The divisions received specific, differentiated funding and mandates. The

divisions of media and educational services were funded almost exclusively by property taxes generated by the local school districts in the service area. Special education was funded through a combination of property taxes and federal funding. The area education agencies did not have taxing authority of their own.

Of the fifteen area education agencies in Iowa, the three that were part of this study ranked second, third and seventh largest in K-12 student population. They served the second, third and tenth most school districts of the fifteen. One agency was located on the very western part of Iowa, one on the very eastern part, and the third was near the east-central part of Iowa. Two of the three agencies had at least one city in the service area with a general population in excess of 100,000 people. The other agency had a city in its service area with a population of over 50,000. All three agencies served small rural school districts, though the agency located in western Iowa served a more rural group of districts than the other two agencies. The three agencies studied had budgets ranging from nearly \$11,000,000 to nearly \$20,000,000, which ranked second, third and sixth largest of the fifteen area education agencies. Two of the agencies in this study were generally larger and more urban than the other area education agencies. The third agency was slightly larger than the average area education agency size, but served numerous rural districts similar to most of the other area education agencies in the state.

Area education agencies were never instituted as a service to or servant of the state department of education. However, the State Board of Education was charged with approving area education agency yearly divisional plans in order for area education agencies to receive state funding. The State Board of Education also maintained some level of control over the area education

agencies with the authority to enforce the Code of Iowa and the rules and regulations established since 1975.

As part of the program planning function of each division, some form of client needs assessment was conducted. Once the needs were determined, services could be offered based on the formulation of a plan. From those interviewed, it appeared that minimal long-range planning was conducted. One person interviewed noted that "each division did a little looking ahead, but not really any specific long-range planning." In another area education agency, an interviewee stated that "each division would project a three year plan, which was then the agency plan." From those who mentioned that some form of division plans were developed, they noted that generally the division director sat in his or her office and developed the plan. There was little collaborative planning done.

A common theme expressed by those interviewed about agency-wide long-range planning is illustrated by the statement, "If there was any long-range plan, I didn't know about it." One person interviewed said she would "characterize the planning that I was aware of as probably more 'responding to' than planning for something." One other interviewee stated flatly that "it was not an agency plan." Another person was even more critical when she said, "I don't recall specifically that we had a mission that was clearly defined."

Each of the chief administrators confirmed that there was no agency long-range plan prior to the strategic planning that was started under his leadership. One chief administrator stated it this way: "There really wasn't any organizational planning, strategic planning, or long-range planning. Planning was not an activity that the agency was involved in." That same sentiment was expressed by the other two chief administrators.

The strategic planning process was instituted by the chief administrators in each of the three area education agencies. In one case, instituting some form of long-range planning was a condition of employment as noted by his board member's statement that "when we hired a new administrator, one of the things that the candidates were questioned about was what their plans were for long-range planning."

Prior to the introduction of strategic planning in each of the three area education agencies, no long-range agency planning was done. All of the interviewees who were employed prior to the introduction of strategic planning confirmed this notion. Strategic planning began, then, as a means of identifying the critical planning issues necessary in order for the area education agency to reach its mission of service and leadership.

Leadership

An important question guiding this research centered on the role of leadership in the development and implementation of strategic planning processes in three Iowa area education agencies. In providing their responses to the questions, the interviewees identified three aspects of leadership. First, the interviewees clearly identified who initiated strategic planning in each of the three area education agencies. Secondly, the interviewees made reference to the role of the chief administrative officer in the continuation of their strategic planning efforts. Finally, the interviewees identified other evidence of leadership necessary in strategic planning.

Initiation of Strategic Planning in the Area Education Agency

Every one of the interviewees responded that it was the chief administrator of the area education agency who was responsible for initiating strategic planning. When asked who initiated strategic planning, two chief administrators responded with the statements "that would be me" and "I did."

The responses made by staff to this question pointed in the same direction: "the chief administrator" and "our chief administrator." A few interviewees were not employed by the area education agency when strategic planning was first initiated; however, they either knew for sure or had assumed that it was the chief administrator who initiated strategic planning.

In the area education agency in which the chief administrator was hired with a condition of employment that he would initiate some form of long-range planning, he chose strategic planning as the form of long-range planning after attending in-depth strategic planning training. In the interview with a board member responsible for hiring the chief administrator, she noted that this area education agency had not been involved in much of any long-range planning, which she believed to be necessary. The occasion of hiring a new chief administrator became the opportunity that the board was seeking to put their full weight behind planning.

In this instance, then, the board set the condition for formal planning to occur, but in all three agencies studied, the chief administrators initiated a strategic planning process, one that is comprehensive, systemic and long-range. Leadership, in the sense of laying the groundwork for change in the agencies, clearly was associated by all interviewees as resting with the chief administrator.

Continuation of Strategic Planning

The results of the interviews suggested that the chief administrator should be involved in strategic planning for it to continue, though the sole responsibility did not always rest with the chief administrator.

In one area education agency, the chief administrator and most of the others interviewed stated that the chief administrator was responsible for the continuance of strategic planning. Similarly, the staff members interviewed

named that particular chief administrator by first name when asked who was responsible for the continuance of strategic planning.

"Strategic planning cannot sustain itself in an organization without somebody in a very high position that says 'yeah, we're doing this.'" This quote illustrated the perceived need for leadership as a key factor in strategic planning beyond the initial symbolic efforts or even beyond the mission.

In the other two area education agencies, however, the responsibility for keeping strategic planning on target was assumed by others in conjunction with the chief administrator: "the chief administrator and the facilitator of strategic planning" took responsibility in one agency. A chief administrator acknowledged co-responsibility: "I am, along with others" he said, and other interviewees underscored the team effort: "it's a collection of individuals though the chief administrator is a key ingredient to it." Others also saw board involvement in stating that the "chief administrator and board of directors" was responsible. Though there were some differences in who was perceived as being responsible for the continuance of strategic planning, generally the chief administrator was either partially responsible or had delegated the responsibility to someone. One interviewee captured the importance of top level leadership in sustaining planning by indicating that "upper management, upper leadership has to not necessarily be in charge of it, but own the sustainability."

While there was no question of the importance of the chief administrator having a visible role in planning, there were a variety of ways that he was seen as exercising that role. He was seen by staff as a "cheerleader," "the evangelist," a "guarantor," "godfather," salesperson," "champion," and "at times, a ceremonial leader."

Evidence of Leadership

Besides the broad symbolic leadership exhibited by chief administrators and other leaders, interviewees cited specific small but important examples of leadership. They pointed to instances of leadership that keep the process moving: as when "the action team leader calls the meetings and sets the schedule," as when co-chairing one of the action teams and setting up the meetings, and when facilitating meetings. Leadership, respondents felt, was important in initiating and sustaining the everyday work that needed to be done to accomplish the planning. This work the chief administrators and other management personnel encouraged staff to take on as a part of their strategic planning leadership responsibilities. Management sought to spread the responsibility for leadership: "we would like you to serve as part of the leadership team for one of the strategies." Some non-management staff acknowledged that they were able to learn new leadership skills and make a contribution to the strategic planning efforts.

Involving staff in strategic planning appeared to be a key factor and will be discussed in more detail later. It is important to note here, however, that involving staff was done intentionally by the management staff. As one manager put it, "leadership's job is the motivation of people, and you motivate through involvement."

Leadership was quite evident in the strategic planning processes observed in this study. It ranged from the political, strategic and symbolic involvement of the board and top management to taking responsibility for the development of small pieces and processes of the overall plan. Evidently, agency staff saw leadership as part of the everyday management required to accomplish work and shape ideas for agency improvement.

Planning Structures

The third question in this study was intended to ascertain information about the planning structures as related to strategic planning in the area education agencies. From the data gathered, it was apparent that a series of important components comprised the planning structure of strategic planning: strong support from the area education agency chief administrative officer and board of directors, a formalized initial planning retreat, action planning and implementation teams, and a process for communication. All components taken collectively made up the planning structure for strategic planning.

Administrative Support

As noted earlier, nearly every person interviewed stated that there was virtually no agency-wide long-range planning of any type in any of the three area education agencies involved in this study prior to the introduction of strategic planning. One interviewee said "I don't recall in the time that I was here since '69 that we had any process that I would call planning from a broad base." And, yet another person suggested that any long-range planning that had been done "was, at best, informal and done by a very, very small group of people." The agencies had functioned, in the past, with simply yearly operational intents rather than long-range plans. It was the current chief administrator in each of the area education agencies of this study who initiated strategic planning almost immediately after being hired.

In addition to the chief administrators role which has been discussed, the board of directors in each of the area education agencies also were an important part of the planning structure. Though the chief administrators initiated strategic planning, "the board of directors have affirmed the recommendation." The commitment by the boards generally started with early involvement during the pre-planning and initial retreat and continued with

financial support. Since they approved all major planning efforts and expenditure of funds, the boards of directors played a major role in sustaining the planning. One interviewee noted that "there has been a huge commitment on the part of the chief administrator and board of directors."

Initial Planning Retreat

Each of the area education agencies used an initial "formalized process" retreat to develop the basic strategic plan. At a retreat, which generally lasted two to three long days, a representative group of about twenty-five to thirty-five internal and external stakeholders used a consensus process in which they clarified their collective beliefs, developed a mission statement for the area education agency, and identified the key strategic planning goals (or strategies). One person reflected on the retreat by stating "the planning by the thirty-five people of the mission, beliefs, strategies and objectives was a wonderful experience."

The retreat group was generally comprised of a significant portion of external stakeholders. One person noted that "fifteen of the twenty-five member retreat team were external customers and ten were internal customers." Another person interviewed thought that involving external stakeholders in the strategic planning retreat was meaningful since it "enabled us to have direct involvement of persons outside our agency in this important decision-making process." And yet another person stated that "we strongly emphasized high involvement of stakeholders" in their initial planning process.

In two of the area education agencies studied, the retreat was led by an external facilitator. The third area education agency retreat used its own chief administrator as the planning process facilitator. The general consensus of those interviewed was that the retreat facilitator should be someone external to the agency. One person summarized the general feelings of many interviewees

when she said: "For sure, use an independent external facilitator, one who isn't a part of the organization. I think that for the credibility of the process, it is extremely important."

Action Planning and Implementation

Once the initial strategic planning retreat group completed its tasks by developing a mission statement and a set of key goals (sometimes called strategies or objectives), then action planning commenced. Once the action plans had been developed and approved by either the internal facilitator or the chief administrator, then some form of implementation process was activated. The action planning and implementation process generally included formalized meetings, reports, and evaluation.

Action plans were developed by a group of about five to fifteen agency staff members, sometimes with help from external stakeholders. An action planning team was responsible for developing a plan for generally one specific goal (or strategy). The action planning team, as one person noted, "would put meat on the bones." The team would have a leader or leaders, would meet regularly for about six months to a year or so, and would communicate its progress to a senior official in the agency.

The implementation of the action plans was done by either a team or, in some cases, by one or two individuals. One person noted that it was the responsibility of "the implementation team to actually operationalize the action plan."

Action planning and implementation were not without criticism. It appeared that in all three area education agencies a gap existed between the initial retreat planning process and action planning and implementation. The key factor seemed to be a lack of carryover of staff from one group to another. Because of this change of personnel, it was difficult for the action team to

understand the full intention of a goal developed by the initial retreat group, or for the implementation team to understand what the action planning team meant with the action plan they developed. Clearly, there was lack of communication. The lack of communication and continuity may have been partially responsible for some action plans being rejected or not allowed to be implemented. One interviewee noted the same weakness in their earlier plan, but suggested that in the future their agency would be "looking at some consistency, staying with the core committee down through the action team down through the implementation."

Communication

Though many staff members were involved in strategic planning, a significant number were not. Of those that were involved, several participated in only one aspect of the whole planning process. Therefore, just a few people in each area education agency had a comprehensive understanding of the strategic plan. This situation created a need for communication to all staff in order to provide a better understanding of all aspects of the strategic plan and its progress. Each area education agency appeared to have made strong efforts to communicate about its strategic plan, though there were differences as well as in approaches. From the comments made by interviewees, the three primary methods of communication were newsletters, word of mouth, and oral presentations at staff meetings. There were also other unique ways of communicating about the strategic plan.

One chief administrator emphasized his effort to communicate with the following metaphor: "I waited until there was a strong wind out of the northwest. I hired an airplane and dumped those suckers (copies of the strategic plan) out." Generally, though, the strategic plans were not distributed as widely as previously stated to either staff or stakeholders. One interviewee in another

agency agreed that the plans were not distributed extensively when he stated that "they're available at any time within our agency and the central office. We don't just disseminate them real widely."

The area education agencies used several different techniques to communicate with their staff, board of directors, and stakeholders. All three area education agencies utilized a newsletter to communicate about strategic planning. Two of the agencies had a newsletter, one of which, for example, was called the "Stratogram", dedicated specifically to highlight the strategic planning efforts and accomplishments. The other agency in the study reported in an agency newsletter. All three newsletters were used to report the results of the initial planning retreat, development of the mission and the plan, action and implementation team progress, and other related aspects of strategic planning being done by their agency. One person noted that there "was constant communication through our internal organization publication."

Another form of communication noted by interviewees in all three agencies was word of mouth. The members of the action or implementation teams were encouraged to discuss their planning efforts with their co-workers and solicit feedback from them. Word of mouth communication allowed personal observations to be expressed more quickly than newsletter articles. Responses from staff to planning efforts were able to be taken back to planning meetings.

All three agencies held meetings once or twice a year with the entire agency staff. It was a general practice, during one or both of the all staff meetings, to discuss some aspect of strategic planning such as strategy implementation progress or a newly revised mission statement. A key to this form of communication was that virtually everyone heard the same message at the same time, generally from the chief administrator. However, the information

provided was often superficial, with little time afforded for staff to become fully aware of the full ramifications of the plan. It was clearly indicated by some of those interviewed that staff who were not involved in some aspect of strategic planning, in general did not appear to embrace the essence and magnitude of the plan as much as those who had been involved.

There were other ways that different area education agencies communicated about their strategic planning efforts. One agency had a very large bulletin board in the main office that provided up-to-date progress on each of the action plans. All three area education agencies provided reports to the various audiences. In two of the area education agencies, all staff received copies of the strategic plan and progress reports, while in the other agency, only copies of the plan were distributed. Progress reports in this particular agency were distributed in the newsletter or noted on the bulletin board. In one agency, members of the board of directors received very little information about the strategic plan progress, while in the other two, reports to the board were given frequently.

The substance of the presentations was generally about the action plans or progress that had been made. An interviewee noted that "there's never a board meeting that goes by that strategic planning isn't mentioned in some context." One interviewee, who also served as internal facilitator in one agency, stated that "there's constant reference to the mission and the strategic plan in just about any meeting that ever takes place in this agency." Sometimes reports about the area education agency strategic plan were distributed to local school superintendents.

Each of the area education agencies studied used other inventive ways to communicate part of the strategic plan to all staff. Two area education agencies displayed picture-sized copies of the mission statement in every

agency conference room and branch office. A staff member in one of the agencies noted that "a 5 inch by 8 inch suitable for mounting copy of the mission statement was distributed to all agency staff."

There were concerns expressed by some of the interviewees about the need to communicate, particularly with those who were not directly involved in the strategic planning activities. One interviewee observed that "if staff haven't gone through the process itself, I think their knowledge is very cursory." Another person stated that it should be important to "make sure it's (communication) a two way street with information back to the people in the organization while soliciting feedback." One other person interviewed indicated the inadequacy of communications, supporting multiple ways of communicating to staff as he noted that "we took for granted that written communication would do it, and maybe that's not the only way."

Seemingly, nearly everyone within an area education agency should have known that there was a strategic plan. A variety of methods were used to inform staff of at least the existence of an agency strategic plan, but even with these, there were misgivings about the adequacy of communications to carry the essential messages about strategic planning.

Organizational Governance

All three area education agencies had similar organizational structures which included a board of directors, chief administrative officer, and other administrative staff positions. Each area education agency also had someone normally referred to as the internal facilitator with the authority and responsibility for the ongoing strategic planning process. The general agency staff were also part of the governance structure because they often had leadership and implementation responsibilities for the strategic plan.

As noted earlier, in one of the three area education agencies, the board of directors made long-range planning of some sort a condition of employment for the new chief administrator hired. In this agency particularly "leadership from the board and expectations from the board were that the (area education) agency become more involved in a planning mode." The chief administrator further noted that "my board was very involved in the early stages. They were on the retreat team. They demanded to be kept informed of our progress."

The other two boards of directors were not as directive nor seemingly as directly involved. From the response to the interview questions, the board members seemed less knowledgeable of the specifics of the strategic plan or the results that had been attained. However, staff interviewed indicated that the boards were still quite supportive of the planning process. "The board supports it (strategic planning)"; "we had commitment from our board"; and, "we had strong support from the chief administrator and from the board" were typical comments concerning the on-going commitment from the governing body.

The chief administrator in each of the area education agencies was primarily responsible for not only the initiation of strategic planning but also the sustainability of the process. In addition, the chief administrator was primarily responsible for maintaining communication with the board of directors concerning the strategic plan.

Many of those interviewed referred to the chief administrator's commitment to strategic planning as one of the key reasons their plan had the support it had. One interviewee noted that "the key factor in the success of our strategic plan would be the strong support from the chief administrator." The agency governance structure, which included the chief administrator and the board of directors, was often noted throughout the interviews as important to strategic planning.

Part of the governance structure of most any organization should be composed of those individuals in middle management positions and general staff. Strong support and commitment to strategic planning from representatives of middle management and general staff was clearly evident from this research. One chief administrator established a strategic planning related performance goal for each of the administrative staff. All three area education agencies involved a variety of staff in the leadership of strategic planning. The staff assumed positions as internal facilitators, action team chairpersons, and implementation leaders.

The strategic planning teams and committees on which administrators and staff served were part of the governance structure of their organization because of the key role strategic planning played in their agency. The strategic planning topics, like remodeling agency facilities or reviewing the organizational structure, were topics normally reserved for executive management. However, a wide variety of agency staff became involved in the discussions of these topics and in making decisions.

The normal governance structure of the area education agencies studied appeared to accommodate and even encourage strategic planning. The involvement and commitment of the chief administrative officer was clearly evident. References were made to the support of strategic planning by the board of directors, though board members seemed somewhat ill-informed. The organizational structures of the agencies studied strongly encouraged the involvement of representatives of all staff in the strategic planning process.

Commitment of Resources

One very important reason for conducting any long-range planning process was to align organizational resources with important goals and objectives to be accomplished. The resources to be considered included both

financial and human. This study identified the level of resource commitment to the strategic plan, the way financial resources were directed, and the methods by which staff and stakeholders were encouraged to participate in the strategic planning process. The results from the interviews were as follows.

Level of Commitment

Everyone interviewed agreed that a substantive level of resource commitment was very important if the strategic plan objectives were to be accomplished. However, there was some variation in views as to the level of commitment made by their area education agency to the strategic plan.

For the most part, those interviewed noted that there had been a significant level of resources committed to the strategic planning process. One division director stated that "there's been a huge commitment on the part of the chief administrator and board of directors to make sure that this (the strategic plan) happens." Another interviewee said that "there are always funds available for the highest priorities." One chief administrator noted that "we've been pretty generous about making sure it (the strategic plan) gets the time it needs." Another chief administrator disclosed his high level of resource commitment to the strategic plan when he said, "It's (the strategic plan) the first priority. We have about an \$18 million dollar operating budget. We can do anything that costs under \$18 million."

A few of those interviewed, however, suggested that the level of commitment was not always as high as needed to accomplish the objectives. One division director stated that "the funding level has not always been adequate" to accomplish the strategic plan. One interviewee said "there's been very little money ever allocated to support the strategic plan." She went on to say "there's just not been the time or funds allocated, especially with the technology strategy." Another person in that area education agency stated that

he "was not sure that many of the activities get enacted because at some point somebody determines there's not money for it." And yet another staff member in the same area education agency observed that when money was not budgeted for the strategic plan, it was "similar to unfunded mandates."

Interviewees generally suggested that the only restrictions on resources that could be committed to strategic planning were those normally associated with budgeting. One person interviewed noted that "when you start reducing services to schools, we begin to ask the question, 'How much of this (strategic plan) are we going to do?'" Since most of the funding for area education agencies comes from property tax collections, one interviewee suggested some restrictions were necessary in order to be "very prudent with our expenditures because we are using taxpayers' money."

The general sense from those interviewed was that some resource restrictions were necessary, though a substantive level of commitment was important, since those resources came primarily from the current operating budget and staff of the area education agency.

Where Financial Resources Were Directed

The financial resources committed to the area education agency strategic plans were used for several different purposes. The resources were used for strategic plan developmental costs, for staff time, and for other necessary expenditures.

Each area education agency held a major strategic planning retreat, normally two or three days in length, to develop their mission statement, beliefs, objectives and strategies. The retreat was usually led by an outside facilitator. In one area education agency studied, the external facilitator was paid \$25,000.00.

There were other expenses incurred for the retreat. Since the retreat was two to three days in length, there was a cost for the participants' travel, the facility at which the retreat was held, the meals and refreshments, and other sundry expenses. In some cases teachers from local schools were invited to the retreat with the area education agency paying for the teachers' substitutes.

The action planning and implementation teams also incurred expenses to accomplish their tasks. The expenses for things like printing and telephone charges were not generally high but necessary. In one of the area education agencies studied, interviewees indicated that these expenses had to be paid for from the team member department or program budgets rather than from a strategic planning program account. Since the department or program budgets had been obligated to previously developed plans, many of the action planning or implementation team plans could not be completed.

As a result of strategic planning objectives, nonetheless, staff were hired. In one area education agency, a receptionist was hired to help overcome an identified communication deficiency. As a result of another plan, three technology staff were hired to provide consultative services to schools. A half-time internal strategic planning facilitator was also hired in one area education agency.

Two of the area education agency strategic plans included facility remodeling as high priorities. In each of those agencies, architects, consultants and attorneys were hired to support the planning process. Actual remodeling construction resulted in extensive costs.

Several interviewees noted that their agency expended resources for a variety of technology needed to provide services to schools and their own infrastructure. Telephone and communication systems were purchased. Toll

free telephone lines were installed. Other expenses were incurred for the technology necessary to modernize a technology center.

A major financial commitment was made in all three area education agencies for staff necessary to plan and implement the strategic plan. One division director observed that "most of what we bought was staff time." Another division director stated that "the biggest expense that I've seen with strategic planning is the time of the persons involved." In some cases staff who were off contract were hired back to complete portions of the strategic plan.

Participation

As noted in more detail as part of the Historical Context, very little long-range planning of any form was conducted by the area education agencies prior to the initiation of strategic planning. The limited planning that was conducted amounted to no more than division planning for the relatively short range -- one to three years. Very few individuals were involved in developing the plans that were done. One chief administrator noted that, prior to strategic planning, the planning that was done "was informal at best, and it had limited involvement by a very, very small group of people." Involving limited numbers of people in planning was in stark contrast to a significant number of staff and external stakeholders who became involved in planning when strategic planning was implemented in the area education agencies studied.

For the initial goal setting retreat, about fifteen area education agency employees and twenty individuals representing external stakeholders were chosen. The intent was to have all stakeholder groups represented both from within the agency and from without. One person interviewed stated that having representatives from internal staff and external stakeholders "helps us focus on our interdependent role and relationship with each other while reducing or

eliminating some of the barriers that have existed between divisions, departments, or between the AEA and local schools."

The external stakeholders generally comprised more than half of the retreat group. These individuals were local district superintendents, principals, teachers, counselors, parents, and others representing the business community. One person stated that "the process has enabled us to have direct involvement of persons outside the agency in important decision-making." Information from all these representatives was potentially helpful to the strategic planning efforts of the area education agencies. Many of the interviewees stated that there should be more involvement in the goal setting portion of strategic planning from the external stakeholders than from the area education agency staff. Internal staff should be more heavily involved in the action planning and implementation parts of the process.

The interviewees indicated that a representative group of staff participated in all aspects of the planning process. Members of the "classified, certified and management staff, and the board of directors" were involved. One person stated that "we had a real cross section" of staff involved. A division director commented that "we made a very conscious effort to make sure that all levels of staff were represented so we would have someone all the way from a maintenance person to the division directors."

There were representatives from all three divisions and administration of the area education agencies involved in strategic planning. One interviewee remarked that there was "usually a mixture of departments and divisions." Having representation from throughout the agency was strongly supported by numerous interviewees.

Interviewees from all three area education agencies noted that participation by staff in strategic planning was desirable and encouraged. The

chief administrators issued invitations to staff to participate in the process and allowed anyone who volunteered to become involved in some manner in the strategic planning process. Articles were published in staff newsletters describing strategic planning and requesting volunteers. Strategic planning participation was generally observed as voluntary, though one interviewee noted that her chief administrator "had an expectation that people will give their time." Generally, staff were encouraged to participate on agency time rather than during evenings or weekends or other personal time. Sometimes the chief administrators even asked certain individuals to participate based on their knowledge of a specific strategy in the strategic plan.

Large numbers of staff were involved in all three area education agency strategic planning efforts. In one case, the chief administrator stated that "nearly 200 of our 320 employees were involved in one aspect of the process or another." There were various reasons interviewees gave as to why staff became involved in the strategic planning process. Some of those interviewed were extremely interested in being involved in the process because they felt that they "had an opportunity to help set the direction for the agency." In other cases, there were people who some felt really should be there, as one interviewee observed, "so you nurture them a little bit." One interviewee expressed this theme when she said, "the greater the involvement and participation, the greater the commitment to the plans developed." Another interviewee stated that "you reap what you sow, and if you sow the seeds of involvement over time, it comes back a thousand times over." Since people were considered the number one resource for these organizations, involving them seemed to develop a deeper commitment to the organization as well.

A chief administrator stated that it seemed to him that those involved in strategic planning "were more committed to the agency and its mission." "We

have more money than time" was a statement made by another chief administrator. He was referring to the fact that strategic planning is, as one person noted, "very labor intensive." In order to gain staff time for strategic planning, services to schools must be decreased somewhat. The same chief administrator also stated that "people will invest their time more in where they think they can make a difference and if it is legitimate."

Even though there appeared to be a strong commitment on the part of the three chief administrators to involve as many staff as possible, many staff members were not involved in any aspect of the planning efforts. And yet, there was a desire by all three chief administrators to gain support for the mission and plans by every staff member. One administrator noted that the best way to get all staff committed to the plan was to "ask them to develop a personal vision" for supporting the mission and strategic plan. As one chief administrator stated, "the only vision we are interested in is our own." However, no universal method was identified for obtaining support by all staff for the strategic plan.

Several of the interviewees suggested that involving staff in the strategic planning process would lead to staff commitment to the mission and planning process outcomes. One interviewee who was a committee member stated that "there seems to be a real sense of a broad base commitment that isn't just top down, but there's a variety of other people that have a sense of ownership with it."

In one particular area education agency, some staff were somewhat discouraged with strategic planning. One person stated: "I spent hours and I didn't see anything really happen. Did they really pay any attention to what we said?" Another person said that strategic planning functions were reassigned to staff without relieving them of their other commitments, thereby creating an overbearing workload. In spite of these dubious feelings about strategic

planning, the sentiment was also stated that "people are willing to do their part if they feel that what they are doing will make a difference."

There were also concerns about the amount of time it took to be involved in strategic planning. One person expressed his concern when he said, "I feel the need to serve my students and yet serve on strategic planning." Another person lamented the fact that some people did not get involved because they feel their "workload was too heavy so how could they take on more." One interviewee stated that some staff were "skeptical of strategic planning because sometimes plans were developed but never implemented." Another concern expressed was that "strategic planning was intended to empower people, but too many things were still controlled from the top." This comment seemed to be more related to the leadership style in the area education agency than to only strategic planning, but clearly it impacted how the latter was carried out.

Staff and stakeholder participation was the most frequently identified factor of strategic planning in this study. All interviewees recognized the importance of involving staff and stakeholders in the planning process with the intent of gaining greater commitment to the mission and the plans developed. The caveats to the practicality of involvement were expressed by a number of interviewees, however, and suggested a problem for implementation of plans.

Other Key Factor

Though not identified initially for this study, another key factor emerged through the interviews for this study related to the results of planning. This section will discuss the concerns that interviewees raised, including an uncertainty about what "results" of planning even means.

Seemingly, one of the reasons for conducting strategic planning would be to obtain results. In strategic planning, goals, objectives, and strategies are established, and action plans implemented. Naturally, then, some type of end

results should be expected. This study of three area education agencies identified tangible and intangible results from their strategic plans. Some of those interviewed, however, noted that they were not sure that there were significant results from the strategic plans.

In many cases it was easy to identify results from the strategic plans because of their tangible nature. As indicated earlier, in one agency, a receptionist was hired to help alleviate an identified public relations shortcoming. In another agency, an individual was hired to coordinate the efforts of all the volunteers. As part of a public relations effort, staff were given name badges and asked to wear them, and agency letterhead was changed while the logo remained the same. And yet another interviewee noted that "seeing results makes people more willing to put in the time and effort."

There were other examples of concrete results from the strategic plans. One agency, as part of its strategic plan, identified the need to remodel its facility. The result was a \$2.8 million project that was completed. As part of another area education agency strategic plan, a new staff evaluation system was developed and implemented and the agency was restructured from three divisions to two.

According to those interviewed, there were also intangible results of the strategic plan. One interviewee suggested that maybe there should not be as much emphasis on gaining a product because the process seemed more important. He stated that "the dialogues and discussions, and even the debates, in a lot of ways further the organization." He went on to note that the discussions "seemed to move the agency towards meeting some customer needs as we proceeded, and moved us toward fulfilling our own mission, too."

One interviewee pointed out that during the two to three day retreat, many topics and issues were discussed. Some issues became part of the

strategic plan, while many did not. However, there was value, she felt, in the discussion of topics even though they may not have become part of the plan. "A particular issue may not become part of the plan, but there are people in this room who make decisions and carry on the work of this agency on a daily basis who have heard this discussion. Just because your issue did not make it into the plan doesn't mean that the discussion has not had an impact on the organization."

Some of those interviewed suggested that the agency was a better organization because of the strategic plan. One person remarked that the strategic planning process caused staff to "better understand some organizational foundations like quality, being data-driven, working toward consensus building, and other group processes." Another person interviewed commented that strategic planning supported a changing culture which included "participatory management." And yet another interviewee suggested that "it (strategic planning) helps us focus in on our interdependent role and relationship with each other, reduces or eliminates some of the barriers that have existed between divisions, between departments, and between the area education agency and local schools." Clearly, these people suggested that the process itself was an important product, though not necessarily the product intended by the plan.

Some of those interviewed, however, were not sure anything had resulted from the strategic plan. When asked about results derived from the strategic plan, one board member stated that "I'm not sure; I guess I don't really know." Another interviewee suggested that "you can only hope that you are going to get results." When asked how you know if you are getting results, one chief administrator stated: "We don't. We only know that we are getting

strategies completed." Another person noted that "we need to get better at documenting results and being more playful about getting results."

A general sense about some of the concerns suggested that the strategic plan should not be given as much credit. Some comments made by interviewees were: "We would have done them (the action plans) anyway." "Some plans didn't evolve and nothing happened." "Since there is no real concrete or measurable evaluation, the results often are fairly subjective and opinion-based." One person interviewed noted that the strategic plan had accomplished some, but maybe not as much as could be. He stated, "Yes, they've improved things, but have they really made a difference or fundamentally changed how we go about doing our business - probably not."

In addition, there was some concern that the amount of control over the implementation of plans from the chief administrator or top management had either stopped the implementation of an action plan or encouraged a rewrite of the plan. A staff person expressed dismay that her "group had developed a product but the product had not been implemented." Another person noted that "there were things that didn't happen that people thought would happen." Though never stated specifically, a few interviewees suggested that the ultimate implementation decision was controlled.

It seemed that there were differences in opinion about what results were gained from the strategic planning efforts. There appeared to be definite tangible results from some strategic plans. However, in other strategic plans, the results may have been simply involving more staff in the decision-making of the area education agency than had been done in previous years.

Discussion of Findings

Though the area education agencies have been in existence for over twenty years, little, if any, formal research has been done relative to their

services, the results they produce or, as in this research project, their planning processes. This research provides information on how three of the agencies are currently conducting agency-wide strategic planning.

Prior to initiating strategic planning, the three area education agencies involved in this research project did very little formal, agency-wide long-range planning. The planning that was done involved only individual division planning and generally only one year at a time. However, at the time this study was conducted, seven of the fifteen AEAs had actively engaged in strategic planning. Of those who had plans, only three had been using strategic planning for six or more years. It is interesting to note that it was about fifteen years after their inception before the area education agencies began to conduct any type of long-range planning as an organization. No one offered an explanation for why this was the case.

Most of the Iowa area education agencies not included in this study were smaller and generally more rural than those in the study. Those area education agencies included in the study were, however, similar in structure, service responsibilities and expectations to do strategic planning.

All three area education agencies had very similar organizational structures which included a board of directors, chief administrative officer, and divisions with specific areas of service responsibilities. All three agencies had formalized strategic plans with an internal strategic planning facilitator who had the authority and responsibility for the ongoing strategic planning process. All three agencies' boards supported strategic planning.

Though it was widely accepted that the chief administrators were primarily responsible for the initiation and sustainability of the strategic planning process in their AEA, the role of other members of the agency staff was anything but clear. The findings of this research, however, added to our knowledge of

the role of staff by noting the role of individuals in middle management and the general staff. Beyond this, it was apparent that organizational structure and administrative philosophy in all three area education agencies was explicit in encouraging the involvement of staff in strategic planning.

In order to organize a strategic plan, some type of process had to be established and followed. Each area education agency conducted an initial retreat, as suggested by Bryson (1988), in order to write an organizational mission statement, establish a list of governing values, detect strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the organization, and ultimately identify the key strategic issues or goals that need to be accomplished. The components of strategic planning noted by earlier writers including McCune (1986), Jenne (1986), Below et al., (1987), Bryson and Roering (1987), Bryson (1988), Herman (1989a, 1989b), Phelan et al., (1991), and Kaufman and Herman (1991), were very similar to those identified in this research project.

In order to accomplish the goals identified by the strategic planning retreat group, action planning and implementation teams were established. These two teams were to carry out the final portions of the strategic planning process. One of the problems identified by the interviewees in all three area education agencies was the lack of continuity between the initial planning retreat group and the action planning and implementation teams. Some of the interviewees suggested that a few members of the retreat should also be members of the action planning and implementation teams. Through overlapping membership, the thought was to provide communication and continuity from the initiation of the strategic plan to the formalized development and implementation of the action plans.

Since there was little overlap, or what overlap there was did not effectively carry the communication, the solution offered by the participants was

not adequately tested in any of the agencies. Given the support in the literature (McCune, 1986; Below et al., 1987; Bryson, 1988; Herman, 1989a) and the self-evident common sense of their proposition, there is every reason to recommend that future strategic planning efforts include this consideration for overlapping membership in their planning design.

The themes of leadership reverberated throughout the literature and was reemphasized in this study. Clearly, the findings of this research study support much of the literature related to the need for leadership in strategic planning (Wechsler & Backoff, 1987; Bryson, 1988; Breck, 1989; Thompson et al., 1990; Phelan et al., 1991). Steiner (1979) provided a clear message when he stated that "there can and will be no effective formal strategic planning in an organization in which the chief executive does not give it firm support and make sure that others in the organization understand his depth of commitment" (p. 80). The chief administrators of the three area education agencies studied initiated and strongly encouraged strategic planning in their respective agencies as a means of changing the way in which their respective agencies operated. This research finding was consistent with what Kotter (1990) and Bryson (1988) suggested, which was that leaders produced change in the organizations they led. In addition, this research found evidence to endorse the need for leadership from the chief administrator for the initiation and continuation of strategic planning. The chief administrator carried the role of instigator, evangelist, godfather, and cheerleader. In short, there was no instance of strategic planning being successful without the full support from the top.

But top leadership, while necessary, was not sufficient. This study also suggested that leadership was needed from others who chaired committees and functioned as internal facilitators. In order to carry out the many aspects of

strategic planning, leadership was delegated to committee chairpersons, action and implementation team chairpersons, and internal facilitators. As noted by Boyers (1988-89), leaders must inspire others to help accomplish the mission of the organization. From the findings of this study, leadership came from widely dispersed persons from all levels of the agency, including non-management positions within the organization.

It should be noted that not all strategic planning authorities support the notion that leadership, as that term was used in this study, is critical to successful strategic planning. Two authorities, one from the private sector and one from the public sector, have diminished the value of leadership in strategic planning. Lorange (1980) suggested a distant role for the chief executive more than the up-close and hands-on role seen in this study. "The CEO should typically not be ... deeply involved" in the process, but rather be "the designer of [it] in a general sense" (p. 2). More recently, Herman (1989b) left leadership completely out of his list of "keys to successful strategic planning (p. 23)" and "pluses and pitfalls of strategic planning (p. 23)", in two publications designed for school administrators. In contradiction to Lorange (1980) and Herman (1989b), but in accord with a wide array of other studies, the research from this study on area education agencies suggests strongly that leadership was a critical component in strategic planning.

In terms of the importance of resources, both financial and human, insisted upon by the literature, this research found that staff agreed that a "significant" level of resources should be committed to the strategic planning process. It was difficult to determine exactly what that meant, however, or even the actual level of resources that had been or should be committed. It was noted, for example, that one area education agency spent about \$2,800,000 in facility remodeling as a result of their strategic plan, and yet, there was criticism

from a few interviewees concerning a lack of resource commitment. The level of resource commitment seemed to vary depending on an individual's perspective. One chief administrator saw the entire agency budget as dedicated to strategic planning, others saw few dedicated resources, and still others seemed uncertain as to what was planning and what was operations.

Perhaps this was due to the fact that financial resources of each area education agency were used in a variety of ways that at least somehow related to the strategic plans. For example, each of the agencies held a planning retreat that necessitated financial support. Resources needed for that retreat appeared relatively clear-cut in the participants' minds to be attributed to strategic planning. Then things became more blurred. The action planning and implementation teams needed financial support for telephone and printing expenses, but of course these teams were actually planning "operations". Was this strategic planning? Interviewees were not sure. In two instances, staff were hired as a result of the strategic plan, but for operations. Technology infrastructure was identified by plans but moved quickly to an operations expense. The facility that was remodeled as part of the strategic planning efforts was sorely in need of remodeling. Were all of these things strategic planning? In all instances other than the retreat, then, the expenses incurred seemed a matter of perspective: what was a strategic planning expense and what was an operational expense that would have likely been incurred with or without the plan? Those seemed to be the points of confusion.

Aside from the difficulty of distinguishing planning from planning products, distinctions among resources also blurred. The issue for interviewees seemed to be clear on the need for resources, but less clear on the type of resources needed. Of all the costs associated with strategic planning, it appeared that most interviewees saw the cost for the people involved in the

many aspects of strategic planning as the greatest cost. None of the area education agencies kept a record of the number of hours spent by staff on strategic planning, but whatever the hours, clearly many interviewees saw time as a major issue in accomplishing the task of planning. The resource in shortest supply came out to be professional time, though of course this may be seen as a monetary issue as well because money spent for professional time is also a financial resource. The two "types" of resources were clearly distinct between, for example, the facility renovation and professional time on tasks, but blurred in that money was actually a resource in how time was allocated. A precise measure of "needed resources" was therefore not possible.

In a still different view of resources, strategic planning was found to be labor intensive, but even with extensive involvement efforts, a number of interviewees found less involvement than they thought was necessary. Though it required many people from each organization to serve on the various teams including the retreat, action planning and implementation teams, many persons were nevertheless still not involved in the process. More participation seemed to be highly desired, though it was recommended that participation remain voluntary. This recommendation further muddled the water in terms of how resource-demanding strategic planning really is. Apparently to be judged a good process by participants, representative participation is inadequate.

The complexity of the issue of resources and participation took on still another dimension by the interviewees. They identified a down side of involvement in that when people gave their time, results were expected. Several of those interviewed became less willing to participate when little or nothing happened as a result of their work on strategic planning. It was quite evident from some of the interviewees that administrators must either implement plans designed by staff or be very careful to explain the reasons why certain

plans were not implemented. People seemed willing to give of their precious time when they were convinced that the results of their efforts would be used.

As a final twist on the resources and participation theme, there were a few staff members interviewed that held a somewhat contrary opinion about their involvement. They were less supportive of involvement because they perceived that strategic planning took too much time away from their primary job focus which was to serve children; the normal workload was not relieved to allow time for strategic planning; and, strategic planning was intended to empower staff, but too many things were still controlled from the top. Below et al. (1987) noted that if staff were going to be involved in strategic planning, then "some provision must be made for shifting other responsibilities during the (planning) period" (p. 21). The interviewees in this study amply supported this conclusion.

The area education agencies made every effort to communicate the strategic plan to their staff. Newsletters, bulletin boards, face-to-face presentations, word-of-mouth, and progress reports were all reported as means of keeping people informed. The area education agencies understood the suggestion made by Below et al. (1987) when he stated "an informational sharing of the plan throughout the organization is absolutely essential if the plan is to be implemented" since many staff "are not aware of where the organization is going or why" (p. 115). But even with major efforts to provide information about the strategic plan to all staff, participants nevertheless still felt out of the loop. Providing communication about the strategic plan did not produce the same level of commitment as participation did to those who were fully a part of the strategic planning process. And this is perhaps telling, for as Fullan (1993) noted, each and every staff person is responsible to help make an organization capable of continuous inquiry, change and renewal. A paradox

seemed to arise that everyone in the organization needed to help make the plan happen, but the means to get everyone committed to the strategic planning mission and goals seemed elusive if not impossible.

Finally, interviewees had different views on the results of the planning process. They attributed both tangible and intangible results to strategic planning. Some interviewees questioned the tangible results of strategic planning suggesting that the products may have developed regardless of the strategic plan. Some staff suggested that the building remodeled and staff hired were necessary and strategic planning helped justify their happening.

The intangible results noted most frequently in this study related more to process than product. Some interviewees noted that the opportunity to be heard and involved in decision-making was important. One interviewee stated "a particular issue may not become part of the plan, but there are people in this room (at the retreat) who make decisions and carry on the work of this agency on a daily basis who heard this discussion."

Though they generally sought tangible results, area education agencies may have gained their greatest results, paradoxically, by simply going through the motions of strategic planning. In the final analysis, participation, communication, and greater association with fellow staff may be the greatest results gained from strategic planning.

In the absence of any agency-wide long-range planning process, the adoption of strategic planning provided these three area education agencies with their first agency-wide planning efforts. The organizational structure, with strong leadership from the chief administrators, encouraged participation, strong support and commitment from staff of all employee ranks. However, participation, support, and commitment did not seem to permeate the entire organization. Both financial and human resources were judged inadequate

but also engendered confusion and concern. At the theoretical level, this study could not respond to what "resources" for planning really meant. Interviewees could not distinguish between: a) costs allocated for planning or operations, b) the difference between professional time and resource allocation, or c) how much participation was enough. In addition, strategic planning raised expectations, some of which were dashed on the hard rocks of reality. Finally, those staff who did participate were torn between the desire to serve their clients and still assist their agency plan for the future, especially when some of the plans developed were never implemented. Participation is necessary, but sometimes comes at too great a cost.

Though the area education agencies made major efforts to communicate about the strategic plan, many staff evidently felt left out of the planning process and thus never accepted a commitment to the mission and plans. Nevertheless, the process of bringing staff and stakeholders together in thinking, discussion, and participation may have been the most significant result of strategic planning. This research provided a further understanding of area education agencies, their agency-wide long-range planning efforts, and the means by which strategic planning was implemented in a specific type of public-sector organization.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Area education agencies were established by the Iowa General Assembly in 1974 to provide more equitable educational services to schools throughout the state and to meet new state and federal special education mandates. The fifteen area education agencies were each comprised of three separate divisions with separate funding. These agencies were to provide service and leadership to local school districts within their respective geographic areas.

In order to provide leadership and service to local school districts, area education agencies must anticipate future educational needs and develop services to meet those needs. By the late 1980s some form of agency-wide, long-range planning came to be seen as imperative in order to collectively serve the identified needs. In order to meet the needs of local schools, AEA agency-wide strategic planning began in 1988. Eight of the AEAs have adopted strategic planning as their agency-wide long-range planning process. Noting the absence of literature on area education agencies and their lack of agency-wide long-range plans, this research project sought to study strategic planning in three of these area education agencies with the longest record of strategic planning.

Employing qualitative methodology, this study focused on the identification and analysis of key factors which influenced strategic planning. Selected staff and a board member in each area education agency who had been a part of the strategic planning process for the agency were interviewed. The research focused on some predetermined factors including the historical context of planning, leadership, planning structures, organizational governance

structures, and resources. The research allowed other key factors to emerge as well. The data gathering technique was a series of interviews in each of the three area education agencies. The interview format contained a major question with additional probing questions which were based on the six research questions of this study.

The study's findings indicated several key factors important in strategic planning in the three area education agencies. First, strategic planning was the first agency-wide long-range planning effort used by the three agencies. Strategic planning incorporated more members of the staff of the agencies than had ever been involved in agency-wide planning. From the comments made by those interviewed, most of the staff involved in strategic planning consequently became more committed to the mission and goals of the agencies. Staff and stakeholder involvement was consistently noted as very important to the success of strategic planning.

Leadership was deemed very important to strategic planning and blended well with the organizational governance structure in place at all three area education agencies. The chief administrative officer in each agency had initiated strategic planning and was seen as the key person responsible for sustaining it. Leadership was not limited to merely the chief administrator. Members of the board of directors, internal facilitators for strategic planning, and staff members who chaired committees and teams were also key leaders. Leadership and the organizational governance structure in all three agencies were necessary and supportive of strategic planning.

The findings, consistent with other research on strategic planning, supported the notion that a number of components comprised the planning structures in strategic planning. Each of the agencies, as part of the planning structures, utilized an initial retreat. The retreat included both staff and

stakeholders, in an effort to establish an agency mission, beliefs, and goals. Action planning and implementation teams should have been critical in moving into action the efforts that were started during the retreat. However, the lack of continuity between the retreat team and the action planning and implementation teams may have been the cause for the lack of implementation or rejection of some plans.

Another finding in this research was the intense need for human resources. The literature on strategic planning generally notes the importance of strong financial support in order to develop and implement the strategic plan. However, this research suggested that human resources, though sometimes indistinguishable from financial resources, may be more important than financial resources to the success of strategic planning; yet they were generally more scarce.

The study's findings also indicated that both tangible and intangible results were attributable to the strategic plan. It was important to staff that they "see" results of the strategic planning efforts. However, for some the process proved more important than the products that resulted from their planning. Moreover, there were some staff who minimized the results by suggesting that the same results would probably have occurred with or without strategic planning.

Finally, since most of the agency staff were not involved in any aspect of strategic planning, communication about strategic planning was imperative. The findings of this study suggest that the communication effort needed to include more than just a printed newsletter. Face-to-face meetings, large and small group meetings, and other techniques were essential to help staff not involved in strategic planning understand what it was and what was happening

as a result of it. Even with these efforts on the part of agencies, there was still a feeling that not enough had been done.

Conclusions

This study yielded several conclusions:

Conclusion 1: Strategic planning, comprehensive and in-depth, was the mechanism of choice in an effort to bring focus and coherence to the area education agencies.

This study pointed out that any long-range planning done prior to strategic planning was limited and divisional rather than agency-wide. Strategic planning was a process which looked at the whole agency and at its relationship with those whom the agency served. Agency staff focused their collective efforts toward agency needs and desires rather than those of the division or programs within a division. Through strategic planning, they intended to become more results-focused.

Conclusion 2: Top leadership is crucial to the initiation and sustainability of strategic planning.

The chief administrator in each of the agencies was credited with having initiated strategic planning in that agency. Those interviewed noted that the chief administrator was also the one who kept the process alive and operational. Without the support and encouragement of the chief administrator and an established organizational governance structure, strategic planning would probably not have been sustained.

Conclusion 3: Action planning and implementation received short shrift in the strategic planning process.

The emphasis of most strategic planning models focused on the front end of strategic planning, including the initial planning retreat, the development of beliefs, mission, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and goals. Very

little emphasis has been placed on the back end of the process, namely the critical role of action planning and implementation, the immense need for staff time, and the necessity of communication.

Conclusion 4: Resources for strategic planning are difficult to attribute and even more difficult to account for in their consequences.

Interviewees were not sure what the financial and human costs of strategic planning really turned out to be due to a lack of clarity about resources, how they were accounted for and how to attribute their consequences. When the literature remarks on resource needs, it should consider the complex accounting issues as a means of accessing the cost-benefit to strategic planning. It would be helpful if the research literature were more clear about the level of resources needed for strategic planning.

Conclusion 5: Talk matters; though there were tangible results, the end product resulting from strategic planning was often intangible.

Through the strategic planning process, involved staff had an opportunity to express their opinions about their agency. They helped make decisions about the future of their agency and they had an opportunity to become more committed to the mission and goals that they helped develop. Because they worked together on strategic planning teams, staff learned much more about their fellow staff members than they ever knew before. This proved important to interviewees as they expressed more connection to the agency-wide responsibility. Bryson's (1988) definition of strategic planning was a "disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions ..." (p. 5). The definition insinuated a tangible product, though the findings of this study suggested that the process was of greater value than the results generated. Though there were tangible results attributed to strategic planning, the

opportunity for participation and collaborative decision-making ranked very high by the staff involved.

Conclusion 6: Don't ask if you don't want to hear the answer.

The chief administrators promoted having staff involved in strategic planning. They asked for volunteers and in some cases nudged staff into volunteering. When staff members became involved, they worked diligently to develop action plans which supported the initial strategic plan goals. However, when the plans and suggestions were, in some cases, not implemented, staff members became discouraged. It appeared that top leadership had simply asked staff members to commit their time with no intention of implementing plans other than those desired by top leadership.

Conclusion 7: You don't know what you don't know until you know.

Some staff were involved in parts of the strategic planning process in each of the area education agencies. However, many staff were not involved in any part or in just a small portion of the process. In order for all staff to learn about the official agency mission, strategic goals, action plans and implementation strategies, communication was necessary, but not always sufficient. Communication occurred in a variety of ways including word-of-mouth from peers, newsletters, bulletin boards, and oral presentations at staff meetings, and though this communication about the process and the results attained was critical to staff members, talking about results was not the same as participating in developing the results, at least in terms of commitment to the process. There are many layers of understanding the strategic planning onion. Talking about the onion is quite a bit different from peeling, cooking or eating it. And so it is with planning. Many staff members did not get to peel, cook or use strategic planning, only to read and hear about it. Just hearing about strategic planning is not the same as using strategic planning, which means that staff

need much more opportunity to be involved in the strategic planning process not just hearing about it.

Implications

There was support for the participation by staff at all levels of the organization in the strategic planning process. Members of the staff who were interviewed supported having representatives involved in the strategic planning process. However, there was nothing in this research that supported the idea that better decisions or end products developed as a result of staff participation in strategic planning. In fact, it may be that participation provided little more than an opportunity to be heard.

It could well be that there was considerable learning that went on during the course of the development of the strategic plan, but persons involved had not adequately reflected on their own learning. It seems reasonable to assume that if people felt that their talk with one another matters, that they were learning from the talk. As they did talk with one another, they were actually in the process of developing a learning organization.

Some staff suggested that strategic planning may have been nothing more than a mask used by the chief administrators to accomplish tasks they desired. There were instances noted by interviewees where plans were completed and submitted to the chief administrator, but no action or implementation occurred. Having staff participate in the process may have provided a forum to engage them even though the decisions had already been made.

One wonders why the plans for an identified goal were never implemented and no reason for rejection provided. There was an aura of skepticism that permeated one agency because of the suspicion that the administrator used strategic planning as a means of attaining his own ends. In

one instance, the chief administrator served as the strategic planning external facilitator, a role normally played by an unbiased party. The staff in that agency were never sure whether the plans they developed were actually theirs or merely those of the chief administrator. Again, staff members felt they were manipulated by the process.

Area education agencies were intermediate agencies which, as referenced in the introduction to this study, were sandwiched between a policy intensive state government and an operations intensive local school system. However, there was virtually no reference to the state department as interviewees discussed their plan. It appeared that there was concern from agency personnel about their relationship to the local school districts, but, in contrast, agency interviewees ignored the state department of education. It seemed that the area education agency strategic plans should have made a better connection with the state department than was evident from this research.

Though it was not an objective of this study to look at the impact of area education agency strategic planning on schools or children, it was disturbing that there was such a lack of mention of a potential impact on students and learning when interviewees were asked about results. Though the planning was agency-wide, was strategic planning still not broad enough? In fact, interviewees spoke of the competition of time, money and their attention between working on the plan and their day-to-day responsibilities. This suggests a need to rethink the focus if not the method of strategic planning by these agencies.

Beyond the relationship of the local school districts and the area education agencies, there was no connection with any other education related entity either. The department of education, universities and community colleges were not referenced at all in the comments made by those interviewed. The

supposition, then, was that nothing tied together all aspects of education in the state. Area education agency strategic planning was seemingly not connected to strategic planning done by any other education entity in the state, and yet, all education entities have a common system-wide primary mission -- learning.

All three area education agencies used one specific, prescribed strategic planning process model. The very prescribed nature of this model seemed to cause the planning process to proceed slowly. It was not uncommon for implementation of a plan to be more than a year behind the development of that plan. It also appeared, though not documented by the research findings, that the slowness of the planning process hindered creativity and delayed results significantly.

The chief administrators made commendable efforts to encourage staff participation in some aspect of strategic planning, however some staff felt overwhelmed. Many staff volunteered their time and talents as encouraged. They became involved in and generally committed to the mission, goals and plans developed. However, even though most meetings were held during the work day, staff were not relieved of their normal responsibilities, which created a dilemma for them. Staff were torn between the desire to serve the needs of their students or to help shape the future of their agency. As the strategic planning process developed, it seemed that those in authority should budget more adequate human and financial resources. By merely encouraging voluntary participation without relief of job responsibilities, staff members seemed to actually overload themselves with work.

Organizational governance did not emerge as a big issue in this study, though it was necessary. The organizational governance structure seemed to blend closely with leadership provided particularly by the chief administrator with support from the board of directors.

Finally, and most disturbing, is the theoretical implication that the current strategic planning model is incomplete and, thus, somewhat ineffective. Strategic planning is a rationalistic conception which attempts to draw all activities under its aegis. While one can agree with its logic, the record of its accomplishments thus far are less than sterling. This study hints strongly that the area education agency personnel want close ties to the field and want to be intimately involved in plans that affect their work. To fulfill these two conditions may require more of a site-based, decentralized model with work organized more from a bottom up and inductive manner and less so from a top down and deductive model of planning. Perhaps neither top-down nor bottom-up is sufficient, but the question of balance needs to be addressed. In short, the findings here strongly hint of the need for a different planning model than those presently being used in these three area education agencies.

Recommendations

On the basis of this study's findings, it is possible to suggest several areas for further research on strategic planning in area education agencies or other public organizations.

First, this study's findings provided some insight into how at least three area education agencies conduct strategic planning by identifying the key factors that comprise their process. To further the understanding of area education agency strategic planning, additional research could focus on the results attributed to strategic planning. It would be quite helpful to measure, in some fashion, the success of the strategic plan.

Second, further research should be done on the role and results of staff and stakeholder participation. Staff, in general, wanted to be involved in the long-range planning for their agency. Many strategic planning models suggest that a representative sample of staff and stakeholders be selected to develop

the strategic plan. However, the research seemed somewhat unclear about the actual efficacy of stakeholder participation since no one individual can truly represent anyone other than himself or herself.

Third, all three area education agencies used a very popular but highly prescriptive model for strategic planning. The model did not appear to connect the initial planning retreat process very well with the action planning and implementation process. A study could be done to determine the efficacy of the particular model used.

Fourth, an external facilitator was intricately involved in guiding the development of the strategic plan. This individual provided guidance to and control over the process. Most public organizations employ someone to provide the external facilitator function. However, very little was known about the type of skills needed by an external facilitator to best help produce a quality strategic plan. A study could be conducted to identify or determine the facilitator skills most likely to produce quality strategic plans.

Fifth, there are many educational organizations in the state. Many of the organizations, such as schools, area education agencies, state department of education, community colleges, and four-year colleges and universities, provide services intended for the same ultimate client - the student. However, there does not appear to be a clear connection between the various organizations. It would seem useful to study the actual connections between the organizations. Once the connections could be established, it might be possible to develop long-range plans that support each other rather than remain separate from each other.

Sixth, aside from supporting the formalized organizational governance and philosophy of the area education agencies, strategic planning also provided an avenue of expression of the more informal organizational

routines to surface. A study could be made to compare the formal strategic planning process with the informal process, which includes such things as getting people from different work areas and groups together, and the importance of talking things through. There could be great value in a better understanding of the informal workings of strategic planning.

References

- Agar, M. (1980). The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Ansoff, H. I. (1988). The new corporate strategy. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectations. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Below, P. J., Morrissey, G. L., & Acomb, B. L. (1987). The executive guide to strategic planning. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Bennis, W. G., & Nahus, B. (1985). Leaders: Strategies for taking charge. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Birnbaum, W. S. (1990). If your strategy is so terrific, how come it doesn't work? New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1982). Qualitative research in education. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1984). Modern approaches to understanding and managing organizations. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1984.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1991). Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Boyers, E. L. (1988-89). Leadership: A clear and vital mission. The College Board Review, 150, 6-9.
- Breck, W. (1989). Suit yourself with strategic planning. The School Administrator, 46(8), 14-15.
- Bryson, J. M. (1988). Strategic planning for public and nonpublic organizations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

- Bryson, J. M., & Roering, W.D. (1987). Applying private sector strategic planning to the public sector. Journal of the American Planning Association, 53, 9-22.
- Burns, J. M. (1978). Leadership. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Code of Iowa. (1992). Des Moines: Legislative Fiscal Bureau, General Assembly of Iowa.
- Cohen, W. A. (1990). The art of the leader. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Cope, R. C. (1981). Strategic planning, management, and decisionmaking. AAHE-ERIC/Higher Education Review Report No. 9. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education.
- Dalton, G. W. (1970). Influence and organizational change. In G. Dalton, P. Lawrence, & L. Greiner (Eds). Organizational Change and Development. Homewood, IL: Irwin.
- Fullan, M. (1993). Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform. London: The Falmer Press.
- Goetz, J. P. & LeCompte, M. D. (1984). Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- Guth, W. D., & MacMillan, I. C. (1986). Strategy implementation versus middle management self-interest. Strategic Management Journal, 7, 313-327.
- Halachmi, A. (1986). Strategic planning and management? Not necessarily. In Marc Holzer, & Arie Halachmi (Eds). Public Productivity Review.
- Herman, J. J. (1988). Map the trip to your district's future. The School Administrator, 45(9), 16+.
- Herman, J. J. (1989a). School district strategic planning (part I). School Business Affairs, 55(2), 10-14.
- Herman, J. J. (1989b). A vision for the future: Site-based strategic planning. NASSP Bulletin, 73(518), 23-27.

- Herman, J. J. (1992). Strategic planning: Reasons for failed attempts. Educational Planning, 8(3), 36-40.
- Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1988). Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Horner, C. D. (1979). Strategic planning for higher education: Management focus. San Francisco, CA: Peat, Marwick, Mitchell & Co.
- Iowa Department of Education. Iowa school and community college data (1995). Des Moines: Iowa Department of Education.
- Jenne, K. (1986). Strategic planning: Taking charge of the future. Popular Government, Spring 1986, 36-43.
- Kaufman, J. L., & Jacobs, H. M. (1987). A public planning perspective on strategic planning. Journal of the American Planning Association, 53, 23-33.
- Kaufman, R. (1991). Strategic planning plus: An organizational guide. Glenview, IL: Scott, Forsman.
- Kaufman, R., & Herman, J. J. (1991). Strategic planning in education: Rethinking, restructuring, revitalizing. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company.
- Kotter, J. P. (1988). The leadership factor. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Kotter, J. P. (1990). What leaders really do. Harvard Business Review, May-June, 103-111.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lorange, P. (1980). Roles of the ceo in strategic planning and control processes. Seminar on the role of general management in strategy formulation and evaluation. Cosponsored by E.S.S.E.C., E.I.A.S.M., and I.A.E., Clegy, France: April 28-30.

- Lorange, P., & Roos, J. (1992). Strategic alliances: Formation, implementation, and evolution. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (1989). Designing qualitative research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- McCune, S. D. (1986). Guide to strategic planning for educators. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). Case study research in education: A qualitative approach. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Mintzberg, H. (1979). The structuring of organizations. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Mintzberg, H. (1994a). The rise and fall of strategic planning: Reconceiving the roles for planning, plans, planners. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Mintzberg, H. (1994b). The rise and fall of strategic planning. Harvard Business Review, January-February, 107-114.
- Nutt, P. C. (1987). Identifying and appraising how managers install strategy. Strategic Management Journal, 8, 1-14.
- Olsen, J. B., & Eadie, D. C. (1982). The game plan: Governance with foresight. Washington, DC: The Council of State Planning Agencies.
- Parson, M. J., & Culligan, M. J. (1985). Back to basics: Planning. New York, NY: Facts of File Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (1980). Qualitative evaluation methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Phelan, D. J., Kirkland, T. P., & Freed, J. E. (1991, April). Strategic planning: A catalyst for shared governance and leadership development. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Council of Universities and Colleges at the 71st Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, Kansas City, MO.

- Porter, M. (1987). Corporate strategy: The state of strategic thinking. The Economist, 303, 17-22.
- Rogers, E. M. (1983). Diffusion of innovations. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Schilit, W. K. (1987). An examination of the influence of middle-level managers in formulating and implementing strategic decisions. Journal of Management Studies, 24(3), 271-293.
- Schmuck, R. A., & Runkel, P. J. (1985). The handbook of organization development in schools. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Siegel, D. (1977). Government budgeting and models of the policy-making process. Optimum, 8, 44-56.
- Steel, R. (1991). From paper to practice: Implementing the corporate strategic plan. Business Quarterly, 55, 119-124.
- Steiner, G. A. (1979). Strategic planning. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Thompson, C. F., Johnson, A. B., Warren, C., & Williams, C. (1990). Facilitating growth and leadership development at small colleges through the interactive approach to strategic planning. Innovative Higher Education, 15(1), 55-64.
- Wechsler, B. (1985). Strategic management of public organizations: Studies of public policy making and administration in Ohio. Doctoral Dissertation. Columbus: Ohio State University.
- Wechsler, B., & Backoff, R. W. (1987). The dynamics of strategy in public organizations. Journal of the American Planning Association, 53, 34-43.
- Wildavsky, A. (1974). The politics of the budgetary process. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.
- Wooldridge, B., & Floyd, S. W. (1990). The strategy process, middle management involvement, and organizational performance. Strategic Management Journal, 11, 231-241.